

Light Comes to the Cumberland: La Grange College and Higher Education in the South 1830-1872



La Grange Military Academy
c. 1830

Fred Heath
July 4, 2026

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2026

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Author's Note

This book began as the history of a college. It became the history of a region.

Founded in 1830 upon a remote ridge overlooking the Tennessee Valley, La Grange College occupied a remarkable vantage point in both geography and time. During the four decades that followed, the institution and its successors witnessed nearly every great upheaval transforming the nineteenth-century American South. Native nations still occupied much of the surrounding country when the college was founded. Within a generation they had been removed westward. Slavery expanded, matured, and came to dominate the region's economy and political culture. Denominational schisms fractured the Protestant churches. Sectional conflict culminated in secession and civil war. Emancipation overturned an entire social order. Reconstruction reshaped political life and educational opportunity. Out of the ruins emerged new institutions dedicated not merely to the education of an elite class, but to the broader instruction of the public.

The story that follows is therefore not simply the history of La Grange College, Florence Wesleyan University, or the State Normal School that succeeded them. It is the story of how one educational tradition confronted the defining crises of the nineteenth-century South. Through its students, faculty, trustees, and communities, we may observe a society wrestling with questions of race, citizenship, religion, learning, and progress. The institutions changed, often dramatically, but the belief that education could illuminate and improve society endured.

The title *Light Comes to the Cumberland* reflects that continuity. The light itself was never fixed to a single building, denomination, curriculum, or generation. It passed from frontier academies to colleges, from colleges to normal schools, and from one generation of teachers and students to the next. The forms changed. The mission evolved. Yet the aspiration remained remarkably constant: that knowledge might bring order to confusion, opportunity to poverty, and understanding to a region repeatedly transformed by forces beyond its control.

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Cover:

La Grange Military Academy. Landscape *circa* 1930 by Jenny Eakin Delony Rice (1866-1949), perhaps to celebrate the centennial of the founding of La Grange College (est. 1830). According to her [biography](#), the painting hangs at the Museum of the Tennessee Valley Historic Society, Tuscumbia, Alabama. Her father, [Alchyny Turner Delony](#), was born in Alabama and was a member of that prominent Tennessee Valley family. Alchyny was an 1856 graduate of La Grange and on July 9, delivered one of the commencement orations. The cover graphic is a depiction taken of that painting from the University of North Alabama [web site](#).¹

¹ "Delony-Turner Item 1. Pauline Jones Gandrud Papers Gift of the Garland Family, 1981. University of Alabama. University of Alabama Special Collections. Box 3969b, Folder 202, [Letter to Mrs. Granrud from Mrs. R. P. Woods, Austin Genealogical Society, Austin, Texas, January 23, 1963](#), p. 2

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PREFACE

On a warm spring morning in 1904 several dozen men wound their way up the rocky slopes of Lawrence's Hill to a long awaited rendezvous. Most traveled by motor car the five dusty miles from Leighton over the same roads they had often covered by foot and horse-drawn wagon forty two years earlier--when they last stood on that promontory. The travelers that day, bent with age, shared two characteristics: they were almost all former soldiers of the Confederacy, and they shared an affection for the first college in Alabama that once stood prominently on that hillside. From its brow, La Grange College had once overlooked the Tennessee Valley. From above, the grand river could still be seen threading the rich plain of its own creation. The cities the river spawned were visible in the distance. But on this morning of reunion, as they mingled, and exchanged the handshakes and hugs characteristic of old men of their era, they confronted the stark reality of the morning sun revealed: On the summit no physical trace remained of the college that had first brought them together.

Gathering at the tiny crossroads of Leighton, Alabama, the men had traveled from across the United States to remember their common past, these sons of an initial immigration into a land so isolated that it had remained virtually untouched until their families' ploughs first turned the deep soil. In their ranks on the mountain that morning were bankers and farmers, attorneys and physicians. Their college, in its various instantiations, was gone now, as was most of village that once surrounded it. With familiar landmarks long vanished, the old men struggled to get their bearings in the unfamiliar landscape. As they ambled around amidst the undergrowth that had long since reclaimed the mountaintop, they were able to reestablish the orientation of their former dormitories, even determining the location of their own rooms. Some reached down among the leaves to pocket fragments of brick that once framed buildings fallen to the torches of Union troops decades before.

Among the attendees on that May weekend were men with diplomas from three instantiations of the La Grange College they remembered: (1) the first Methodist college that opened in 1830 and closed its doors in 1855; (2) its successor that moved faculty and students nineteen miles to the banks of the Tennessee River and as Florence Wesleyan University maintained a presence in the Valley for nearly another twenty years; and

(3) the short-lived phoenix that rose from the ashes of its departure to re-open on the mountain as La Grange Military Academy, attracting scores of students to the old campus in the run-up to the Civil War. Altogether only a few hundred students graduated from these schools, although considerably more had attended for a year or more.

Few in number, the graduates' impact on the region was broad. The faculty and curriculum of La Grange College prepared the matriculants, raw students in a raw land, for important roles in a society that grew up around them. As one writer observed, "The culture and discipline which radiated from the academic circle softened the manner and broadened the mind of the generation which molded the life and policy of the state of Alabama" and beyond.² In the decades of their own productivity and contribution, they would serve as governors, senators and congressmen; doctors and lawyers among them would found Vanderbilt University and their own first president would lay Vanderbilt's cornerstone. They would build the first railroads in the South, fight against Santa Ana, survive Goliad, and found the Republic of Texas. Its board of trustees would include among its members prominent Choctaw and Cherokee chieftains; other board members would fund the Tennessee River docks from which native tribesmen were placed aboard steamboats and involuntarily exiled to new homes in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Some would advocate the abolition of slavery, while others would engineer the schism of the Methodist Church in order that the southern branch of that church could embrace slavery's cause. One of its presidents would write the moral philosophy volume that was employed as the textbook of choice in colleges across the south in theological defense of slavery, and at least one of its graduates would figure prominently in the formation of Ku Klux Klan, its name itself perhaps coined from the similar name of a social fraternity there.

Many of course failed to make the mountain journey in 1904. Some had died of old age before the reunion; others had died too young, victims of violence or disease that marked the era. A La Grange president died suddenly from infection following routine dental surgery. One quarter of the students of La Grange Military Academy fell on the battlefields of the

²Walter B. Posey. La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College. Birmingham Southern College Bulletin, XXVI (November 1933), p. 3

civil war. A promising young protégé of La Grange College professor Henry Tutwiler would suffer a mortal wound in battle in Virginia. One Florence Wesleyan graduate, a Union general, would die of wounds on the outskirts of Atlanta, while his chemistry professor died a lingering death fighting as a CSA infantry private at Manassas.

The narrative that follows is the story of La Grange College, and the students and faculty who comprised it. La Grange is emblematic of and metaphor for the tumultuous times in which it existed, and the narrative of those times is an integral part of its brief history. I trust you will find the bittersweet lessons of its time an interesting and informative read.

Fred Heath
August 18, 2011
February 4, 2026

Prologue:

Frontier Alabama before 1798

Between 1750 and 1860, the Atlantic World experienced a violent reordering driven by the imperatives of industrial capitalism. The evolution of the textile industry, beginning with wool and culminating in cotton, created insatiable demands for raw materials, labor, and land. Nowhere was this nexus of production, dispossession, and subjugation more starkly realized than in the U.S. South. There, the intertwined forces of the Industrial Revolution, settler colonial expansion, and racial slavery produced a plantation complex that not only enriched the transatlantic capitalist economy but also laid the groundwork for one of the most brutal systems of racial domination in history.

If the warp of this study is the emergence of La Grange College, and the embrace of higher education and other elements of European civilization among the frontier people of Alabama, the weft has a darker side. For the story of Alabama and the Deep South generally is the ascendancy of textile capitalism, which fueled both the removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and the importation and exploitation of enslaved Africans, imposing a deeply integrated system of economic development and human subjugation.

The first phase of the Industrial Revolution, originating in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, was marked by significant technological advancements in textile production. The mechanization of spinning and weaving—epitomized by innovations such as the spinning jenny, the water frame, and the power loom—dramatically increased output and altered the scale and structure of textile manufacturing³ Initially focused on wool and flax, the industry soon turned to cotton, favored for its versatility and compatibility with mechanized production. With this shift, the American South would become the principal source of the insatiable demand of raw cotton for Britain's burgeoning textile mills. As will be seen the invention of

³ Allen, Robert C. [*The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*](#), Cambridge University Press, 2009.

the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 enabled the profitable cultivation of short-staple cotton in upland regions.⁴ As the rapacious British demand intensified, cotton rapidly eclipsed other southern export crops, such as tobacco and rice. By 1860, the United States supplied nearly 80% of Britain's cotton imports.⁵

Critically, the expansion of cotton cultivation demanded not only labor but land—particularly in the fertile territories of the Deep South. Much of this land was home to Indigenous nations, notably the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole. These nations, despite formal treaties with the U.S. government, clung to territories increasingly coveted by white planters and speculators.⁶ Settler colonialism in the American context did not merely aim to rule Indigenous populations but to remove and replace them. This logic culminated in the Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson, which led to the forced displacement of more than 60,000 Native Americans from southeastern states.⁷ The “Trail of Tears”—the most infamous episode of this removal—resulted in thousands of deaths and the forced migration of entire societies.

La Grange College would open the very year the Indian Removal Act became law. The emptied lands of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Cherokee soon became the heart of the cotton kingdom, centered upon the Black Belt of Alabama and Mississippi. The state-facilitated expropriation of land thus enabled the geographic expansion of slavery and plantation agriculture.⁸

The plantation economy that followed in the van of indigenous removal demanded the immediate infusion of a massive labor force. While the British and American economies reaped the benefits of industrial production, the cotton fields of the South relied on enslaved African labor. Though the transatlantic slave trade was officially ended by the U.S. in 1808, the internal domestic slave trade expanded rapidly. More than one

⁴ Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014.

⁵ Riello, Giorgio. [*Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*](#). Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁶ Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. [*The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*](#). New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007

⁷ Claudio Saunt. [*Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory*](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020

⁸ Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. [*An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*](#). Beacon Press, 2014.

million enslaved people would be forcibly relocated from the Upper South to the cotton frontier in the Lower South between 1800 and 1860.⁹

Throughout the Deep South, the plantation system was marked by a brutal and intensely exploitative labor regime. The gang system, employed throughout the Deep South, subjected enslaved people to sunup-to-sundown labor under constant supervision and threat of violence. As Baptist demonstrates, the productivity of enslaved labor increased not through innovation but through systematic coercion, creating what he calls the “whipping machine”—a feedback loop between physical punishment and rising quotas.¹⁰

By 1860, nearly four million African Americans were enslaved in the



1 Winslow Homer, Picking Cotton, wood engraving *Harper's Weekly* 1874

United States, with over 90% residing in the South. Their labor generated immense profits—not only for planters but for textile manufacturers, financiers, insurers, and merchants throughout the Atlantic economy.¹¹ Indeed, cotton became the essential pivot for the commercial world. The economic system that emerged in the South was not a feudal holdover but a

core component of global capitalism. The slave plantation complex—anchored in expropriated land and sustained by enslaved labor—produced commodities for international markets, fueled the expansion of credit and finance, and integrated the American South into the circuits of industrial

⁹ Johnson, Walter. [Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market](#). Harvard University Press, 2001.

¹⁰ Baptist, Edward E. [The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism](#). Basic Books, 2014; Baptist, Edward E. “Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping Machines, and Modern Power,” Chapter 1, [Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development](#). Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

¹¹ Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014

modernity.¹² As such, the southern plantation system underscores the long-standing relationship between slavery and capitalism. The system's scale, labor regimes, and rationalization of violence were designed for the maximization of profit. Enslaved people were not only workers but also capital assets; their bodies collateralized loans, underwrote investments, and undergirded economic expansion far beyond the cotton fields.¹³

The rise of cotton capitalism in the American South illustrates that economic development under capitalism is often inseparable from racialized violence and environmental transformation. The Industrial Revolution did not simply benefit from southern slavery; it depended upon it. The factories of Manchester and the slave quarters of Alabama were mutually constituted nodes in a single, exploitative world system.¹⁴ In the years before the Civil War, the frontier South was transformed into the epicenter of a global capitalist system fueled by cotton. This transformation was driven by three interlinked processes: the mechanized demands of industrial textile production, the settler dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the enslavement of African laborers. These forces did not operate in isolation but reinforced one another in the creation of a plantation economy that was both modern and brutal. The wealth generated through this system flowed outward—to factories in Britain, banks in New York, and markets around the globe—while the costs were borne by the millions of people whose lives were destroyed to make cotton king. This triadic structure of industrial capitalism, native removal, and slavery remains central to understanding not only the history of the American South, Alabama and the Tennessee Valley, but the foundations of global modernity itself.

Before the Europeans.

Before 1800, the expanse of territory that now comprises Alabama was little known to the Western colonizers who cursorily exploited its natural resources and traded with the indigenous tribes that fiercely resisted systematic incursion into its interior. Geography and geopolitics

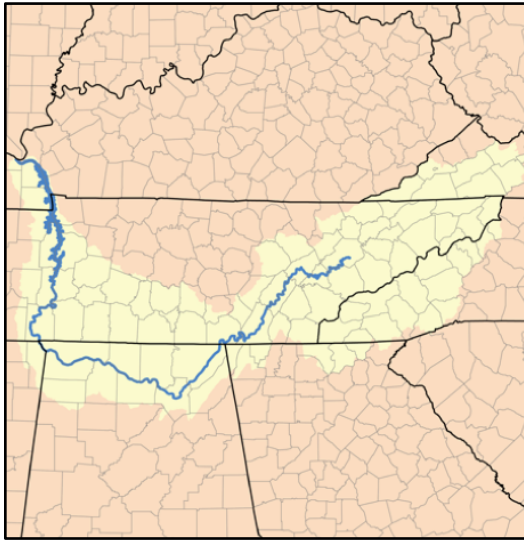
¹² Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014; Eric Williams. [*Capitalism and Slavery*](#). University of North Carolina Press, 1944.

¹³ Bonner, Christopher James. [*Remaking the Republic: Black Politics and the Creation of American Citizenship*](#). University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

¹⁴ Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014; Riello, Giorgio. *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

explained the region's insulation from the colonial expansion and from the active displacement of native tribes actively taking place along the eastern shore and across the continent's heartland to the north.

The Tennessee Valley, where the Methodist Church would found La Grange College in 1830, had for several centuries been lightly populated by



2 Tennessee River Watershed Karl Musser

the Native Americans. Broadly speaking, the region between Birmingham on the south and Nashville to the north, and Knoxville to the east and Florence, Alabama to the west was a common hunting domain of the Indian tribes prominent in the region at the time. Few tribal settlements could be found in the Valley. However, the Tennessee River watercourse provided a well-traveled highway among eastern tribes. Along its perimeter the resolute determination of the Creek, Chickasaw and Cherokee tribes was sufficient to

dissuade early exploitation by English, French or Spanish colonials. Only later would the power and influence of the local tribes be shattered by United States' political and population pressure.

On the western side of the Appalachians, the Holston River connected tribes from Virginia with the Cherokee along the Tennessee River near present day Knoxville. Footpaths and portages connected travelers along the Tennessee to the Coosa River, flowing into the Alabama River and from there via the Mobile Bay into the Gulf of Mexico. Just as the Cherokee restricted the flow of tradesmen and prospective settlers on the Tennessee River, the vigilance of the Creek and Choctaw constrained exploitation of the Coosa-Alabama-Mobile drainage basin.¹⁵

In western Alabama, just beyond the Muscle Shoals and the present day city of Florence, Alabama, the Tennessee River turns abruptly northward, flowing three hundred miles through Tennessee and Kentucky to join the Ohio River at Paducah. From Paducah, the Ohio flows into the

¹⁵ Harvey Jackson. [*of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama.*](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995, , p. 99.

Mississippi, a combined 950-mile journey to New Orleans and then into the Gulf of Mexico. At the bend of the Tennessee River, where it turns its course northward, were convenient portages to the upper reaches of the Tombigbee and down that waterway to Mobile Bay. This vast expanse of waterways, portages, and paths provided a trade network for native tribes across much of the continent for thousands of years.¹⁶

Introduction of the European.

For the native populations, the pace of change quickened in the sixteenth century. A growing European presence in the Gulf of Mexico and the exploration of the Mississippi and the Great Lakes anticipated conflicts in Alabama and the Tennessee Valley.

Initially, Spanish interest in the hemisphere was directed almost exclusively toward the south -- to the Caribbean, Mexico and South America. At the time Cortez was laying waste to the Aztec civilization, [Alonso Alvarez de Pineda](#) was exploring the Gulf from Florida to Mexico and in 1519 entered Mobile Bay, likely exploring upriver for several miles, pausing to trade with the native population and repair his vessels.¹⁷ In 1539, [Hernando De Soto](#) sailed from Havana with 600 conquistadores to carve his bloody path through the Southeast. His forces interacted with tribes in the bend of the Tennessee near Guntersville. Learning the Tennessee Valley to be largely uninhabited, he pivoted south into central Alabama. His soldiers mauled Chief Tuskaloosa's warriors in the Battle of [Mabila](#) in October 1540, killing perhaps 1,000 inhabitants and burning the settlement. But the battle extracted a pyrrhic price upon DeSoto's forces. Battered, bloody, and largely without provisions and bearers, he and his conquistadors were driven up the Tombigbee and out of Alabama. In his flight, he reached the Mississippi River whose lower reaches had been probed by Alvarez de Pineda in 1519, and into whose waters DeSoto's own body would be subsequently ingloriously disposed by his troops in 1542.¹⁸

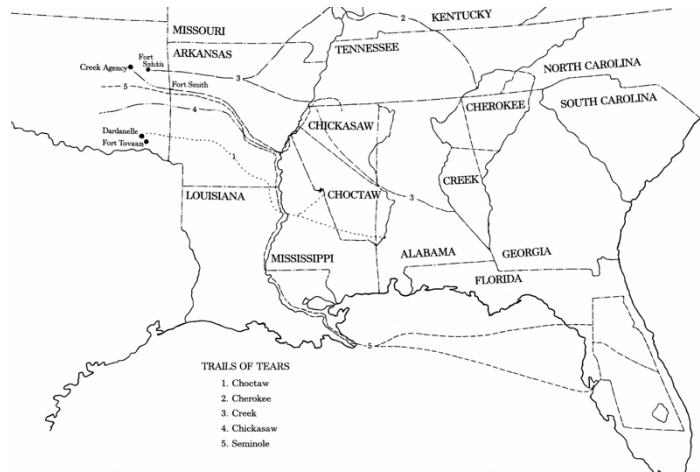
¹⁶ Donald Davidson. [The Tennessee. Volume One. The Old River: Frontier to Secession](#). Nashville: J. S. Sanders & Company, 1991; Crane, Verner W. "[The Tennessee River as the Road to the Carolinas: The Beginnings of Exploration and Trade](#)." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June 1916), pp. 3-18.

¹⁷ Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898l, pp. 10-12.

¹⁸ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.39; DeRosier,

The Tennessee Valley itself would remain for almost two hundred years a lightly populated hunting ground shared by the Chickasaw, Creeks, and Cherokee.¹⁹

De Soto's forces were probably the last Europeans to see the civilization of the Alabama river tribes at the height of their power and accomplishment. In the aftermath of the *entrada*, succumbing to the pathogens like smallpox borne by the Europeans, the indigenous culture and population collapsed.²⁰ This initial incursion -- part exploration, part treasure hunt, and part martial intimidation -- marked the hostile intrusion of one culture upon another, effectively marking the beginning of the Alabama frontier.²¹



3 Original Homeland of the Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek Chickasaw and Seminole Tribes

What would later become the focus of European foreign policy and the backbone of subsequent American economic growth--the Mississippi River and the tribal lands along the Gulf of Mexico--would be virtually ignored by Europeans for almost a hundred years. The precious metals that drove the conquest of the southern hemisphere were not

Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation. Pp. 5-7; Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 27.

¹⁹ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.14. Taylor, Alan. [American Colonies](#). New York: Penguin Books, 2002. In *The Penguin History of the United States*. Eric Foner, ed. P. 40.

²⁰ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 22-30. Harvey Jackson. [of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995, electronic text, 27.

²¹ Daniel S. Dupre. [Alabama's Frontiers and the Rise of the Old South. A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier](#). Malcolm Rohrbough and Walter Nugent, editors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 1-5.

plainly in evidence in the region. Mexico and Peru demanded and received most of Spain's energy and its efforts at colonization during the period.

Then from Canada, the French pressed steadily down the Mississippi River, [René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle](#) naming the region he explored, *La Louisiane*, and claiming it for France. At the same time, the British colonists expanded their Atlantic seacoast presence, founding the large city of Charlestown in 1670. Slowly but steadily, the pressures upon the tribes that occupied drainage basin of Mobile Bay and the watershed of the Tennessee would grow. The European presence would gradually increase, but almost two hundred years would pass before the European pressures would again rise to a level that would threaten the existence of the native people of the Alabama region.²²

As they would be when the indigenous presence in the region was finally extinguished, the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creeks and Choctaw people were present for these earliest European arrivers—Spanish, French, English and American. In the western reaches of the Tennessee Valley where La Grange College would be built, and Florence Alabama would grow to a city of modest size, the Chickasaw and Cherokee dominated, with Cherokee presence most evident on its eastern upland reaches from present day Huntsville to Chattanooga. The Cherokee numbered about 20,000, and the Chickasaw about 6,000.

To the south of the Cherokee and occupying most of eastern, central, and southeastern Alabama were the Creeks. Their population of 20,000 was about the same as the Choctaw who could be found to the southwest, near Mobile Bay, along the rivers and into Mississippi up to the Chickasaw lands.²³ Around 1650, the Chickasaw would retrench their territory. While still claiming the larger Tennessee Valley as a hunting ground in concert with the Creek and Cherokee, they concentrated their population in upper Mississippi and a few western Alabama creeks where those entered the

²² Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, pp. 10-13; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 16-21. Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898l, pp. 18.

²³ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 10; Peter Cozzens, [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 22-30.

river. Warfare between the tribes was rife during this period. The Creeks were perhaps the most militant. Armed by the British after their arrival in the Carolinas, they waged war against the Choctaw, with slave trade through the Charlestown market being a primary objective. Between 1670 and 1715, Creeks provided slave traders in Charleston with as many as 20,000 captives.²⁴

The Tennessee valley was a lightly populated hunting area frequented by most of the tribes. At one point, the Shawnee pressed down from the north, attempting to exploit the vacuum, but were defeated by a joint Chickasaw-Cherokee force around 1721. After that battle, the Tennessee Valley would remain lightly occupied for decades. The [Mitchell map of 1755](#) listed no settlements along the vast expanse of the river in that region.²⁵

At the same time, the players were changing on the European geopolitical stage. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 ended the unquestioned supremacy of Spain on the oceans. Over the next century, the English would press forward with their settlement of the eastern seashore from New England to the Carolinas, and the French would extend their interests to the north, along the banks of the St. Lawrence River. Both were preparing for a time when they would likewise challenge Spanish hegemony in the Gulf, for the Spanish claims remained tenuous along the shoreline north of Mexico.²⁶

During the 17th century, as France took control of the Mississippi, new ties between the Gulf and the Canadian north emerged. The French built forts up the waterway all the way to the Great Lakes. As the Spanish had done before them to the south, the French and British embarked upon a feverish period of colonization in North America. With population growth came stability, urbanization and the demand for infrastructure and accouterments unnecessary upon the frontier. Along with trade, military protection, the rule of law, and the growth of farms and cities, the settlers carried with them a hunger for education. In 1638, [Harvard College](#) was

²⁴ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 49.

²⁵ Wyatt F. Jeltz. "[The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians](#)". *Journal of Negro History*. 33, 1 (January 1948), pp. 24-37.

²⁶ Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 21.

founded, almost two hundred years before the first student would walk the campus of La Grange College. [Francois de Laval](#), the first bishop of French Canada, founded the [Séminaire de Québec](#) in 1663. Along the American frontier--mile by mile--plowed fields, schools, churches, and meeting houses would mark the unrelenting advance of first English colonial and then American settlers. [William and Mary College](#) would open its doors in Williamsburg in 1693. At the time of the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the colonies would be supporting 9 universities built upon the template of Oxford and Cambridge: Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, New Jersey (Princeton), King's College (Columbia), Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania), Rhode Island (Brown), Queen's College (Rutgers), and Dartmouth.²⁷ In important ways, the American college that emerged in the post-colonial period would differ from their English counterparts, Oxford and Cambridge, in at least two ways. In the first instance, governing authority was vested in boards of visitors, or **trustees**, rather than ceding those powers to the faculty. In the second instance, as part of a deliberate effort to restrict faculty authority, the boards vested strong executive authority in a **president** or chancellor. Those aspects of college governance would define La Grange College when it opened and continue to distinguish American higher education today.²⁸

Steadily, the English cultural presence grew along the eastern flank of the tribes that controlled Alabama and the Tennessee Valley. In 1663, King Charles II granted a charter for the [Province of Carolina](#). And in 1670, the present-day Charleston (Charles Town) was established. In 1698, Charleston South Carolina established one of the first [public libraries](#) on the continent. The social and domestic expressions of culture were slowly working their way southwards and inland. Virginian [John Lederer](#) was exploring the Appalachians and [Thomas Batts](#) and [Robert Fallam](#) reached the New River valley in West Virginia. Inevitably, the perimeter of indigenously controlled lands was being compressed, and as the native population retreated or withdrew, those lands were occupied by contingents of English settlers.

²⁷ Rudolph, Frederick. [The American College and University: A History](#). Plunkett Lake Press, p. 28. Kindle Edition. Hyperlink above to Internet Archive Disability Access; "Colonial Colleges," *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed July 13, 2026; Hoeveler, J. David. "The Colonial Colleges: Forging an American Political Culture." *Historically Speaking*, vol. 6 no. 2, 2004, p. 31-34

²⁸ Thelin, John R. [A History of American Higher Education](#). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004, p. 12.

From the north and west, the French exerted their own pressure upon the region. In 1682, the intrepid René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, in the company of native bearers, left the proximity of Fort Wayne Indiana and canoed the Mississippi River to its outlet on the Gulf of Mexico, near present day Venice Louisiana. La Salle envisioned a string of trading posts across the Illinois territory and down the great river. A fortified deep-water port at its mouth would guard the Mississippi and a French heartland empire from British and Spanish incursion.²⁹ Arriving at the mouth of the Mississippi, he claimed Louisiana and the grand waterway for France.

French trading presence in the region would soon become more prevalent and in time would make itself felt along the Tennessee River and up into the Carolinas. Unfortunately, LaSalle's own adventures would, like Narváez and De Soto, end badly. On a subsequent Gulf voyage, La Salle missed and sailed past the mouth of the Mississippi, ending up in Matagorda Bay on the Texas coast, where he unloaded his prospective colonists and cargo. Again, losing his way from the tiny Fort Saint Louis in what is now Victoria County, in an effort to relocate the mouth of the Mississippi, La Salle was murdered by members of his dispirited party in 1687. His tenuous little outpost was soon eradicated by hostile natives.³⁰ Even as trappers and traders braved the region greater numbers, large scale French exploitation of the northern Gulf region was still in the future.

Spain in Pensacola. 1698. But the French activity was not without immediate consequence. Reacting to French activity on the Mississippi, the Spanish began to intensify their own presence along the Gulf. Florida had been visited in the distant past by [Ponce de León](#), [Pánfilo de Narváez](#), and [Hernando de Soto](#) and was the site of the failed [Tristán de Luna](#) colonization attempt in 1559-1661.³¹ Finally, Spain established a permanent fortified foothold at [Pensacola](#), Florida in 1698.³² Spain's soldiers and ships were only a short sail from Mobile Bay where the

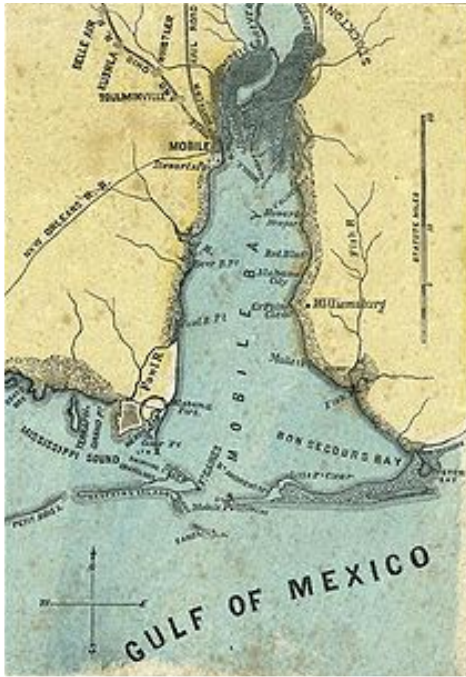
²⁹ "[La Salle, Rene Robert Cavalier, Sieur De](#)". *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed September 1, 2011.

³⁰ Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, pp. 26-27; see also Wikipedia for general information on the explorer.

³¹ Worth, John E. "[The Luna Expedition: An Overview from the Documents](#)." 50th Annual Conference of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Symposium on The Tristan de Luna Shipwrecks and Settlement (1559-1561) in Pensacola, Florida (Fort Worth, Texas, 01/2017)

³² "[Pensacola](#)," *Wikipedia*.

Alabama-Tombigbee rivers spilled into the Gulf. Not to be outdone, in 1699-1701 [Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville](#), French Canadian, asserted a French



4 Mobile Bay and the northeastern Gulf of México from Guillaume de L'Isle's *Carte de Louisiane* (1781)

presence at Biloxi (Maurepas) Mississippi and Mobile Bay (St. Louis). Initial explorations of Dauphin Island and the bay followed. Proximity bred tension between the two powers.³³

Spain, asserting the Gulf of Mexico to be a Spanish lake, laid claim to the entire Gulf coastline as its own. The Mexican governor protested to d'Iberville his occupation Biloxi. Iberville rebuffed the Mexican envoys and seized the opportunity to ask the French throne to offer to purchase Pensacola from Spain. However, France took no action, and nothing happened as each nation persisted on its own geopolitical agenda.

France in Mobile 1702. Shortly after the Spanish protests, d'Iberville boldly intensified the French presence into

Mobile Bay, establishing in 1702 a settlement at [Twenty Seven Mile](#) Bluff on the Mobile River. Untenable during times of high water, the fort was relocated to the current Mobile site in 1711. Mobile would serve as the center of French resistance to the steady southern press of colonial settlers from Georgia and the Carolinas.³⁴

While the rise of an English-speaking culture of the Tennessee Valley was little impacted by the tumultuous century that would follow along the Gulf coast, a grasp of the relations among the Indian tribes and

³³ Usner, Daniel H. *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, P. 13.

³⁴ Albert James Pickett. *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*. [with] Thomas McAdory Owen. *Annals of Alabama 1819-1900*. Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, p. 7; Peter J. Hamilton. *Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 105; Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: The Making of an American State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 24.

the French, Spanish, British and Americans over who would control Mobile Bay and the Alabama-Tombigbee River Basin is necessary to understand the entire region's early history. It is useful to provide a brief overview of developments.³⁵

The French Influence from Mobile and the Mississippi.

Mobile was the beginning of stable European settlement in the area, but except for limited trading forts, the French would not materially extend its civilized presence beyond Mobile. And for a hundred years, it remained a garrison city. Along the riverine interior of Alabama, the Creeks continued to command the Coosa, Tallapoosa and Alabama, as well as the Chattahoochee. The Chickasaw and the Choctaw were to the north and west of the city, and the Cherokee in the far north-eastern reaches of the state. They constricted settler flow up and down the Tennessee River. Mobile was a military outpost with few lay inhabitants, and few efforts were made for the education of its young people.³⁶ In 1742, an application by Governor Bienville for a college to educate the youth among a white population of approximately 300 inhabitants was denied by the crown on the grounds that "the colony was too unimportant for such an establishment."³⁷

Fort Toulouse. As was the case with the rest of the continent, Alabama was blanketed with a network of native trails, used less for the transport of goods, than for movement between hunting grounds and war. DeSoto, Narváez and other explorers used the native trails though they were little more than blazed paths, without bridges or causeways. For trade, the French out of Mobile made use of the extensive rivers to transport their goods, with a land route blazed to [Fort Toulouse](#), erected within a decade of the resettlement at Mobile (circa 1714-1717). Situated at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers (about ten miles north

³⁵ Din, Gilbert C. "[Empires Too Far: The Demographic Limitations of Three Imperial Powers in the Eighteenth-Century Mississippi Valley.](#)" *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*. Vo. 53, No. 3 (Summer 2008), pp. 261-292.

³⁶ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889.](#) Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 25.

³⁷ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889.](#) Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 4, 19..

of present-day Montgomery and 4 miles from Wetumpka) Fort Toulouse served as a regional trading site with the Creeks and also served to check the press of the British traders and adventurers into the Creek territory, covering as it did the approach about the southern flank of the Appalachians to both Mobile and the Mississippi³⁸ Garrisoned and maintained until 1763, Toulouse represented the farthest eastern extension of French influence into Alabama. From Mobile, the French gradually earned the loyalty of the Creeks and a steady trade developed in the interior of Alabama. Only the Chickasaw, who practiced a loyalty to the British, remained beyond their influence.³⁹

In time, the center of French presence in the Gulf would shift from Mobile, first to Biloxi in 1720 and then to New Orleans in 1722. Mobile would sink to second tier status among the nine districts into which French Louisiana came to be divided, and by 1728 was estimated to have fewer than 60 white families still residing there. The French during their time in the state did not materially expand beyond a few plantations on the Mobile and Tensas Rivers.⁴⁰ And while New Orleans grew quickly to more than ten times its population, Mobile would continue to play a key role in French policy toward the native population of the region.⁴¹ In 1726, Mobile and New Orleans accounted for 38 percent of the colonial population of the region. Fewer than 500 colonials lived in the smaller settlements of Natchez Trace, Yazoo, Pascagoula, Natchitoches, and Toulouse.⁴²

³⁸ P. J. Hamilton. [*Early Roads of Alabama*](#). *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898, pp. 28-33, pp. 80-89; Usner, Daniel H. [*Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*](#). Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, p. 28; Thomas, Daniel H. [*Fort Toulouse: the French Outpost at the Alabama on the Coosa*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989, p. 1.

³⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 16; Thomas, Daniel H. [*Fort Toulouse: the French Outpost at the Alabama on the Coosa*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989, p. 1.

⁴⁰ James Grant Wilson, John Fisk. *Appletons' cyclopaedia of American biography*, v. V. p. 114; Willis G. Clark. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 25

⁴¹ Peter J. Hamilton. Colonial Mobile. [*Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821*](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898

⁴² Usner, Daniel H. *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, p. 50.

The French introduced slavery into the region. Lieutenant Governor Bienville began pressing France for slave labor as early as 1701. Active importation of slaves from Africa and the Caribbean began in 1717. In 1721, the cargo ship [Africane](#) sailed into Mobile Bay with a cargo of 100 slaves with ships arriving at least yearly afterwards. By 1724, Governor Bienville promulgated a short version of Louis XIV's [Code Noir](#) extending slavery, and prohibiting interactions of slaves with almost anyone else, from the French West Indies to its American colonies. Bienville was recalled shortly after its promulgation.⁴³ The total enslaved population at this time, according to Sellers, was about seven thousand in the Louisiana territory.⁴⁴

The Press of the British Colonials from the East.

But even as Fort Toulouse was being built, the press of the unrelenting British advancement began to be felt. Carolina's establishment and the settlement of Charlestown in 1670 represented a shift in geopolitical power, bringing the English and their colonists closer to the Spanish and the French to their south and west.⁴⁵ By the end of the century, English traders, following Creek and Chickasaw paths, had reached all the way to the Mississippi River.⁴⁶ Two Carolina traders—Thomas Nairn, Indian agent for the Carolina colony, and Price Hughes—developed the strategy of persuading the Cherokee and Creeks to work with them and other traders to test and resist the French and Spanish. Nairn had a vision building English trading posts along the Tennessee River and diverting that trade from Mobile and New Orleans. Hughes had a somewhat more

⁴³ Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821.](#) Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 107; [Alabama Department of Archives and History. Alabama Timeline of State History.](#) Online. Accessed February 5, 2026. Usner, Daniel H. [Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783](#), Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Usner, Daniel H. [Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783](#), Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, p. 51; Sellers, James Benson. [Slavery in Alabama.](#) University of Alabama Press, 1994. [Library of Alabama Classics Series](#), p. 4.

⁴⁵ Piker, Joshua, [Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America.](#) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Usner, Daniel H. [Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783](#), Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, p. 16.

expansive plan to actively colonize the Tennessee River valley, establishing permanent English-speaking settlements, including one at the head of navigation on Muscle Shoals. Among the very first conceptions of colonization west of the mountains, their vision proved to be short-lived, as both Nairn and Hughes were killed in separate tumultuous native uprisings.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, by 1735, a mere 30 miles from Fort Toulouse, the English erected their own first outpost. The stockade was across the from [Okfuskee](#), visited by Nairn in 1708, and described by European traders as the largest town in the Creek nation and to have 450 armed warriors within the main village and its immediate environs.⁴⁸

The pressures of English-speaking colonials on the shoals region of the Tennessee River continued to grow despite the violence of the frontier. The termination of navigation of the shoals made it a natural trading post, and the Cherokee had long been accustomed to trading with the whites to their east. In time, the French would attempt to establish their own connections and fortifications there, ensuring eventual confrontation.⁴⁹ The Chickasaw, however, were a powerful deterrent to the French efforts successfully penetrate the Tennessee Valley, and at no time did they prosper above the Tombigbee-Alabama confluence.⁵⁰

In 1733, Oglethorpe's first boatloads of debtors sailed up the Savannah River to establish his Georgia colony. Within a few years Augusta emerged as a competitor with Charleston for the deerskin trade.⁵¹ By 1740,

⁴⁷ Crane, Verner W. "[The Southern Frontier in Queen Anne's War.](#)" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (April 1919), pp. 379-395; Crane, Verner W. [The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732](#). Durham: Duke University Press, 1928; Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 10; Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999-. Online. Accessed February 5, 2026

⁴⁸ Goff, John H., "[The Path to the Upper Trading Rouge in Georgia to the Creek Indians.](#)" *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 39, 1 (March 1955), pp. 5-8; Piker, Joshua, [Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 16; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.29.

⁴⁹ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935 p. 12; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 9

⁵⁰ James Grant Wilson, John Fisk. *Appletons' cyclopaedia of American biography*, v. V, p. 114.

⁵¹ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p.53.

traders from as far away as Virginia were traveling through the big bend area of the Tennessee River, reaching the Chickasaw settlements on Bear Creek, along what is now the Alabama/Mississippi border. Here, the colonialists reported encountering other traders pressing their way along the Tennessee from the Mississippi River or overland from New Orleans and Mobile. Traders from both directions carried their goods down the narrow time-worn trails on pack horses, with as many as 20 animals in an individual trader's train. Often the traders banded together for security. Their animals were laden with inexpensive trade goods, guns, blankets, and liquor which they traded for furs, pelts, and other harvests from the forests. The traders were generally tolerated by the natives, living in the indigenous villages even as the inhabitants planned raids against the first wave of settlers bent on settling permanently on lands the tribes regarded as their own.⁵²

Oppressively, the population pressures from the east began to grow. The slave trade, already introduced by the French to the south, became a reality in Georgia in 1749. If not yet evident to all, the conditions were being introduced that would lead to the displacement of the native population and the rapid growth of slavery.

The Treaty of Paris, 1763. The English-speaking future of the region was probably cemented by the [Treaty of Paris](#) in February 1763 and a series of other protocols reached by the parties between 1762 and 1764. The agreement ending the French and Indian War (or the Seven Year's War as it was known in Europe), had far-reaching implications for France, Spain, Portugal, Britain and its American colonies, inaugurating an extensive period of British dominance. The treaty removed any strong French presence in North America. Among the consequences in the Southeast was the ***cession by France of Louisiana to Spain except for the lands on the eastern side of the Mississippi that were ceded to Great Britain. By the treaty, all of Florida fell into British hands.***

Administratively, Britain then divided its acquisitions into East Florida and West Florida. Pensacola was established at the administrative city for West Florida and the Apalachicola River served as the boundary

⁵² Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p.9; Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 17.

With the Treaty of Paris, the French effectively exited the Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast, ending La Salle's vision of empire. A rejuvenated Spanish presence continued from New Orleans, Louisiana and from Havana, Cuba having been regained from the British. Both Spain and Britain, to the south, would vie for the loyalty of, and seek alliances with, the Choctaw, Creeks and other tribes. From Mobile and Pensacola, British traders would regularly explore opportunity in the Tennessee Valley. And the Valley would soon open to English-speaking immigrants moving westward over the Appalachians through Kentucky, western North

In 1767, the English re-organized the territory of West Florida, extending the border northward to the line of $32^{\circ} 28'$, approximately where the city of Montgomery is located today. There were

5 British West Florida After the Treaty of Paris (1763)

⁵³ Peter J. Hamilton. *Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 176; DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 9.

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the area into which the British government actively encouraged land grants and broadened the area in which prospective settler travel across formerly tribal territory could be attempted. The area above the 32° 28' appears to have become part of indigenous reserve in which land grants could only be obtained through special license of the crown. Secondly, it provided a broader corridor for Loyalist exodus during the revolutionary war, as they fled from hostilities in the Carolinas and Georgia to the less fiercely contested regions of West Florida.

And finally, the area between the 32° 28' line and the 31° would become a bone of contention between the United States and Spain after Britain's departure from the region, impacting the foreign policy of both Spain and the U.S.⁵⁵ Although the Spanish would ultimately accept 31° as the boundary, the 32° 28' line brought the British crown's interests closer to the Tennessee Valley, and kept open the doors of intrigue until its final exit from the Gulf region decades later.

From Pensacola, the British maintained a *garrison mentality*, trading with the tribes of the interior. During the brief period of British rule, from 1763 to 1783, their numbers were otherwise insufficient manage or dominate the local populations. Nor were there significant steps taken to enhance infrastructure or educate their citizenry. A military road was contemplated linking Pensacola and Natchez, with designs of limiting contact between the Spanish and the English-speaking settlers in Kentucky. But nothing came of the plan. Closer by, a road was constructed between Pensacola and Mobile. Travel was by ferry from Mobile Bay to Bay Minette, and overland to Pensacola, with a ferry over the Perdido River.⁵⁶ A 1765 treaty with the Choctaw, aimed at containment, defined the eastern border of the tribe, relegating them essentially to the southeastern part of the current state of Mississippi.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Stephen B. Weeks. [*History of Public School Education in Alabama*](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913., p. 8 Library of Congress book.

⁵⁶ P. J. Hamilton. "[Early Roads of Alabama](#)". *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898., p. 33.

⁵⁷ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [*The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 10.

Because of the “Cherokee blockade”, Mississippi was settled earlier than the more proximate Alabama. Settlers from the colonies on the Atlantic coast made their way overland and then down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, or up from the English new settlement in far West Florida.⁵⁸ The first settlers came from North Carolina and settled in the region between Manchac and Baton Rouge. Crossing the mountains from the Carolinas and Virginia and making their way across Tennessee, the settlers constructed flatboats, descending the Ohio and the Mississippi to their destinations.

Successive waves from Georgia, the Carolinas and further north established themselves upon Bayou Sara, Bayou Pierre and along the Homochitto in the far reaches of West Florida. As the word spread, other emigrants arrived from Great Britain, Ireland, and the British West Indies.⁵⁹



6 Flatboat descending a western river, illustrating mid-19th-century inland navigation. Wood engraving after Alfred R. Waud.

The numbers were crushingly disadvantageous to the native population. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, perhaps 65,000 Creeks, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee were in the southeast. The European populations in Mobile and Pensacola were very small.⁶⁰ But almost 2,500,000 colonists and slaves were present on the eastern

⁵⁸ Albert James Pickett. [*History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*](#). Sheffield: Republished by Robert C. Randolph, 1896, p. 323.

⁵⁹ Albert James Pickett. [*History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*](#). [with] Thomas McAdory Owen. Annals of Alabama 1819-1900. Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, p. 323.

⁶⁰ Braund, Kathryn E. Holland. *Deerskins & Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1885 – 1816*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 9.

seaboard. While the colonial population of Kentucky and Tennessee was still small, it was steadily expanding—despite British policies aimed at restricting it. More than 800,000 lived in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia alone.⁶¹ The population of Georgia was 33,000 by 1773.⁶²

During this time, there began a modest migratory trickle along the Tombigbee and Tensas Rivers, not particularly from the coasts, but rather American settlers moving downriver from the north or overland, from the Mississippi and down the Tombigbee watercourse.⁶³ Others, at considerable risk, cut their way from Georgia across the Creek country. As they settled in the British lands, they received liberal land grants.⁶⁴ Their numbers swelled in the throes of the revolutionary war as Tories fled in large numbers toward the Tensas. One such planter was [John Linder](#) (1726-1802), who originally hailed from Switzerland. An early trading post was established on the Tensas at the current town of [Stockton](#).⁶⁵

Alabama during the last years before Independence

In the period between 1762 and 1780, when West Florida was in the hands of the British, they controlled the hinterlands in the region where the French had maintained Forts Toulouse and Tombecbe. And the region was soon filled with traders. [Treaties of 1763](#) establishing British dominance disallowed the settlement of colonists west of the Appalachians.

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris, 1763, the King of England, by proclamation, reorganized the British acquisitions into the three provinces of West and East Florida and Canada. The land claims of her seaboard colonies were limited westward to the Appalachian chain. All

⁶¹ “[List of colonial and pre-Federal U. S. historical population.](#)” *Wikipedia*, (last accessed online August 8, 2024).

⁶² Braund, Kathryn E. Holland. [Deerskins & Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1885–1816](#). Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 9.

⁶³ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 26

⁶⁴ Albert James Pickett. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period. \[with\] Thomas McAdory Owen. Annals of Alabama 1819-1900](#). Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, p. 417.

⁶⁵ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 64.

the land between the 31st parallel, the Appalachian continental divide, and the Mississippi River and Canada was an “Indian Reserve,” a sort of “no man’s land” where governors were forbidden to make land grants, and where initially the settlers possessed no legal claim, and could make no settlements without special license. Colonial soldiers from Virginia who fought for the crown against the French were not to be entitled without special license to the lands beyond the mountains. The crown’s intent was to check the rampant growth of the seaboard colonies and retain for Indian occupation, and for the lucrative fur trade, the lands to the west of the mountains.⁶⁶ The indigenous tribes and the irrepressible settlers found themselves in this legal tension until the end of the revolution and the assertion of American sovereignty over the region.

As they had done along the eastern seaboard, where the British needed land, they would trade with the native tribes, exchanging goods for land title. In 1765, the British secured the first two treaties with the Indians, one securing from the Choctaw a large swath of land along the Tombigbee and the other with the Creeks for a narrow strip of land along the coast. Anticipating U. S. policy, this practice would continue for the next three quarters of a century until the indigenous tribes were entirely removed from Alabama.⁶⁷ Deer hunting became the primary occupation of tribesmen, and herds thinned drastically. Younger deer were killed, and hunters ranged further afield. Even as the tribes delivered half million pounds of deerskins to the trading houses, they fell deeper into debt, and by 1773 the Creek debt alone amounted to over 650,000 pounds of skins.⁶⁸

The launching pad for the American migration into the Tennessee Valley itself was from the Holston frontier, where settlers from West Virginia and North Carolina gathered for penetration into the rich lands of West Florida, floating the Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers

⁶⁶ Rowland H. Rerick. [*State centennial history of Ohio: covering the periods of Indian, French and British dominion, the Territory Northwest, and the hundred years of statehood. State Centennial History of Ohio.*](#) Madison, WS: Northwestern Historical Association, 1902, pp. 62-64.

⁶⁷ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama.*](#) Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 16; Peter J. Hamilton. [*Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821.*](#) Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, pp. 184-185.

⁶⁸ Peter Cozzens. [*A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South.*](#) New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 56 – 58.

to the touted opportunities in the lands ceded to the British by the Spanish and French. Those migrations were fraught with danger as the Cherokee and Creeks particularly resented the use of their hunting grounds as a thoroughfare. For the migrants a less arduous option beckoned: to remain in the area and to settle among the indigenous tribes. By 1779, [James Robertson](#) (1742-1814), [John Donelson](#) (1718-1785) and many others would carve out a settlement at French Lick, current site of Nashville, that offered settlers an alternative to the dangerous trek to West Florida, where land grants awaited.⁶⁹

In 1779, the big bend of the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals was still a largely unpopulated region. But it was an area encircled by swelling population centers that presaged its own development and the end of the indigenous populations there. Nashville, New Orleans, Natchez, Mobile, and Pensacola were in the hands of colonial powers; each made their influence felt.

Nashville. Led by James Robertson and John Donelson, Nashville was part of the Western frontier of the rebellious colonies, within the territory claimed by North Carolina. Initially, the settlement was predominantly agrarian, its growing press of inhabitants as yet relying on subsistence farming and hunting. Slavery was present in the young Nashville settlement but was on a smaller scale than in the southern plantation regions to their east. Trade was limited, primarily involving fur and deerskin trade with the native tribes and agricultural exchange with neighboring settlements. By 1800, Nashville had a population of no more than 350, of whom about 135 were enslaved.⁷⁰

New Orleans. In 1779, New Orleans, a bustling port city, was under Spanish control, having been transferred from France in 1763 after the Treaty of Paris. Slavery was integral to the French/Spanish economy, with enslaved Africans working on plantations and in the port. New Orleans was a key gateway port for the export of pelts and agricultural

⁶⁹ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 10.

⁷⁰ "Nashville, Tennessee," *Wikipedia*, last accessed August 8, 2024. (See: Cumfer, Cynthia (2007). [Separate peoples, one land: The minds of Cherokees, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee frontier](#). Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press. p. 132; Garrett, William Robertson and Albert Virgil Goodpasture. [History of Tennessee, Its People and Its Institutions from the Earliest Times to the Year 1903](#). Nashville: The Brandon Company, 1903; Putnam A.W. [History of Middle Tennessee, or Life and Times of General James Robertson](#). Nashville TN: Printed for the Author, 1859.

products, like sugar, indigo and tobacco as well as the import of goods from Europe and the Caribbean. On the eve of the American revolution the total population of New Orleans, free and enslaved numbered perhaps 4,500.⁷¹ New Orleans remained in Spanish hands until 1801, when it was retroceded to France. In 1803, pursuant to the [Louisiana Purchase](#), France turned the city over to the United States.⁷² By 1810, New Orleans had grown to almost 25, 000 people.⁷³

Natchez. In 1779, Natchez came under British control, part of British West Florida, acquired from the Spanish in 1763. Natchez was a significant agricultural hub, known for its fertile lands, ideal for cotton and tobacco plantations. Slavery, of course, was heavily entrenched, with plantations relying on enslaved African labor for the cultivation of cash crops. The economy centered upon the export of both cotton and tobacco. Goods were imported from Britain and other colonies.⁷⁴

Mobile. Founded by France in 1702 as the first capital of Louisiana, Mobile would remain in French hands for decades before coming under British suzerainty at the Treaty of Paris. It would remain under British control until the later years of the American Revolutionary War when it would fall briefly into Spanish hands. Mobile was a smaller port city than New Orleans, with a mixed economy of agriculture, trade, and fishing. The population included Europeans, native Americans, colonists, and Africans. Slavery was certainly present but was not as extensive as in the plantation-heavy regions. Enslaved people worked in agriculture, crafts, and as domestic servants. The port of Mobile engaged in the export of agricultural products and the import of manufactured goods from Europe and the Caribbean. The Spanish tariff on the Mobile River vexed the settlers in the Tensaw region and inhibited development there. Mobile became American territory in 1813 with the outbreak of the U.S. war with Britain. The tiny earthen redoubt commanded by [Colonel John Bowyer](#) was

⁷¹ LaChance, Paul. "[New Orleans in the era of Revolution: A Demographic Profile](#)". Paper presented at the 20th annual meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, New Orleans, La., April 1, 1989. Last accessed online August 8, 2024.

⁷² "[Louisiana \(New Spain\)](#)", *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed February 7, 2026.

⁷³ David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 10.

⁷⁴ "[History of Natchez, Mississippi](#)." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed February 7, 2026; James, Dorris Clayton. [Antebellum Natchez](#). University of Texas. Ph. D. Dissertation. Austin: University of Texas. 1964.

constructed there in that year and was the focus of British naval assaults before and after the Battle of New Orleans.⁷⁵

Pensacola. The Treaty of Paris (1763) granted Britain all of Florida, which it divided into East and West Florida, with Pensacola the capital of the latter. While Pensacola was still in British hands in 1779, it would not be for long. Spain would retake Pensacola in 1781 during the American Revolution. Under both the British and the Spanish, slavery was present, with enslaved Africans working in agriculture and as laborers for the military and civilian populations. Spanish West Florida was a more diverse society with a social and economic fluidity at variance with British and American norms. Exports from Pensacola were primarily timber, barrel staves for the West Indies, and naval stores.⁷⁶ By 1819, Pensacola was in U.S. hands.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “[History of Mobile, Alabama.](#)” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed February 7, 2026; Hamilton, Peter J. *Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821.*

Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 359-63. The sequence of occupation for Mobile was France (1702-1763), Great Britain (1763-17-80), Spain (1780-1813), and the United states.

⁷⁶ Dupre, Daniel S. “The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.”, in Sean Patrick Adams. *A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, pp. 62-63. For information on Pensacola under British control see Johnson, Cecil. “Expansion in West Florida 1770-1779.” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 20:4, pp. 481-491; for information on Spanish rule there see Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785 – 1810*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

⁷⁷ “[History of Pensacola, Florida.](#)” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed February 7, 2026. Among the colorful characters of the era were [George Galphin](#) who directed his trade empire from Silver Bluff, South Carolina; [Lachlan McGillivray](#), who conducted his affairs from a headquarters on the Coosa River some six miles from old Fort Toulouse which the British had allowed to fall into ruins; [James Adair](#), who controlled trading among the Chickasaw, and the Mobile-based [Panton, Leslie & Company](#) and [Alexander McGillivray](#) that controlled trade west to the Mississippi. See: Wright, Amos J. *McGillivray and McIntosh Traders: On the Old Southwest Frontier, 1716-1815*. Montgomery: New South, 2007.

Muscle Shoals and the Settlement of the Tennessee Valley

Through the [Proclamation of 1763](#) and other negotiations with indigenous tribes, the British attempted to negotiate lines beyond which the settlers would not be allowed to cross.⁷⁸ But frustrated in their expectations for land, the backwoodsmen of Pennsylvania and Virginia carved their own land holds as they saw fit, taking and holding their farms by force of arms, exchanging violent acts with the natives who resisted their encroachment. Against an impending horde of migration stood a thin population of some perhaps 15,000 Cherokee spread across parts of present-day Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. Some colonials settled in areas believed to be part of Virginia, but it was not long before immigrants elected to ignore the order not to settle in the Tennessee region, [the first known settlements occurring as early as 1769](#). The pressures upon the Cherokee were such that in 1770, the British negotiated the [Treaty of Lochaber](#), awarding them modest compensation for intrusions to that date, and drew a line along the Holston and Kanawha Rivers as the no-settlement line. A year later, the redoubtable John Donelson in his survey of the line, moved it further to the west to accommodate encroachments that had already occurred.⁷⁹



7 Proclamation Line of 1763

⁷⁸ Calloway, Collin Gordon. [The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America](#). NY: Oxford University Press, 2006; "[Proclamation Line of 1763](#)." George Washington's Mount Vernon. Website. Accessed February 7, 2026.

⁷⁹ Nance, Benjamin C. [A Survey of Sites Related to the American Revolution and War of 1812 in Tennessee](#). Tennessee Division of Archeology, 2004, p. 22.

Cherokee Land Cession. In 1775, land speculator [Richard Henderson](#) (1735-1785) met in northeastern Tennessee with Cherokee tribesmen and under the terms of the [Treaty of Sycamore Shoals](#) purchased all the land south of the Ohio River between the Cumberland River, the Cumberland Mountains and the Kentucky River. The private land transaction dispossessed the Cherokee and opened the doors to a flood of migration into the lands north of the Tennessee River, leading to the settlement of Boonesborough and other towns, and anticipating the movement of Robertson and his band to [French Lick](#), or Nashville as it would soon become. This constant flood of determined immigrants into the reserve increased pressure upon the attractive lands to the south. The majority of the first immigrants into the Tennessee River lands during the era of British sovereignty over the Indian Reserve were from the Kentucky and the lands beyond.⁸⁰

The crush of immigration into the reserve incited the Cherokee to resist further settlement or suffer greater loss of land. One of their chieftains, [Dragging Canoe](#), led many followers away from the upper Cherokee lands and down the Tennessee and in 1777 established the native villages along the Tennessee and Chickamauga rivers that would remain hostile to the southward movement of the English-speaking settlers for years afterwards. The “[Cherokee Blockade](#)” and the hostility of the Creeks below them in central and south Alabama were only two of the reasons for the looping path taken by Carolinians and Virginians through the Appalachians and across Kentucky/Tennessee enroute to the British land grants in new West Florida. The other was the perversity of the Tennessee River itself. Several factors were at work inhibiting its early utilization as a migration route through the territory. First of all, there were the perils of traversing the mountain region by river. From the western side of the mountains, any effort to move large numbers of people downriver to the main body of the Tennessee River would take the travelers in small boats of eight or nine tons capacity the 200 miles downriver over the Clinch river or a like distance down the Holston through hostile Indian territory in the region around Knoxville to Chattanooga, in an area that came to be known

⁸⁰ Brown, John. [Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from of the Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West, 1838](#). Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, 1938. Hathi Trust. Text searchable version; Dease, Jared. “[Treaty with the Cherokee; Treaty of Sycamore Shoals; a.k.a. known as “Henderson’s Purchase.”](#)” Hawkins County Tennessee Deed Book (pp. 147-50) as accessed online Anchor: North Carolina History Online Resource. Accessed February 7, 2026

as [Nickajack](#). Dangerous to all, traders with their trade goods could traverse more easily than larger groups whose intentions to settle and remain were fiercely resisted.⁸¹

Too, the three-hundred-mile swing upward of the Tennessee near Florence to the confluence of the river with the Ohio still left West Florida bound travelers a long way from their destinations in the region around Manchac Louisiana on the western side of the territory. But perhaps most daunting was the forty mile stretch of the Tennessee in the area known as “the muscle shoals.” Broken by these shoal waters, the Tennessee River would never materialize as the natural highway many envisioned in the half century after the first attempted navigations around 1780. The shoals impediment created a natural “stopping place” and transfer point for goods and people bound downriver to market. It remained for a lengthy period a technological obstacle that thwarted the river’s fullest development.⁸² Reminiscing late in life, [William Basil Wood](#) (1820-1891), a looming Valley personality, would lament that the region never achieved the prospects of those early settlers who populated the region had envisaged.⁸³

But what of these shoals? What was the nature of the obstacle or impediment they represented? In these early periods of river transportation, people and goods generally moved in one-way journeys on crude vessels called “flatboats.” Constructed entirely of rough sawn wood, and clumsily navigable, the boats would be disassembled and used for lumber when travelers reached their destinations. Abraham Lincoln himself twice piloted flatboats laden with goods from Indiana to New Orleans, in 1828 and 1831. By this time, it would be possible to book return passage on a steamboat bound up the Mississippi. In 1780, return was usually by foot or horse along Indian paths overland through Mississippi—a lengthy and dangerous journey. Navigable by canoe, the formidable obstruction of the shoals usually could not be otherwise

⁸¹ John Talbot. *History of North America; comprising a Geographical and Statistical View of the United States, and of the British Canadian Possessions...* Vol. II. Leeds: Davies and Co. 1820, p. 136. Google Books.

⁸² Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. *Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860*. New York: The Columbia University Press. 1908, p. 5

⁸³ Wood, William B. “[Historical Address of Hon. Wm. B. Wood, July 4, 1876](#)”. As published in the *Florence Gazette* July to September 1876. Accessed December 14, 2010.

traversed in any but the highest water, when the river levels rose, usually in the Fall.⁸⁴

The shoals themselves stretched from Brown's Island near Decatur all the way to Florence, 37 miles or so, with a precipitous drop of some 3.5 feet per mile. In low water, the sand and gravel that had piled up over the rock reefs created shoals that were themselves a navigation hazard to flatboats. A series of rapids and falls made downriver traffic dangerous and upriver navigation by pole and rope all but impossible. Three distinct "turbulences" were encountered moving through the run through the shoals: Elk River shoals, Big Mussel, and Little Mussel shoals. In the most dangerous parts of the run, the river could drop fifteen feet in within a mile, and according to early travelers the roars of the shoal waters could be heard from ten miles away.⁸⁵

It was from Fort Patrick Henry on the Holston River that Col. John Donelson assembled his fragile flotilla of small craft for their descent downriver to the Shoals. The river course from the fort, down the Holston to the Tennessee and all the way to the Ohio was not unknown to trappers and explorers, but few large settlement parties had braved it. Donelson was part of the surging migration across the mountains into the Indian Reserve, Virginians and Carolinians willing to forego land rights and claim their lands by force of arms. Earlier in 1779, Robertson, Donelson and others had carved out a permanent settlement at French Lick, made a first planting, and were now in now in the process of moving their families to the settlement amid



8 John Donelson

⁸⁴ [Alabama](#). Historical . Historic America.Net. Accessed February 7, 2026; Crane, Verner W. "The Tennessee River as the Road to the Carolinas: The Beginnings of Exploration and Trade." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June 1916), pp. 3-18; Donald Davidson. [The Tennessee. Volume 1. The Old River: Frontier to Secession.](#) Nashville: J. S. Sanders and Company, 1991, p. 12-13.

⁸⁵ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History. A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999](#); William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama.](#) Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 61.

hostile Indian territory. While Robertson was simultaneously traveling the strenuous overland trek from Fort Patrick Henry to French Lick with supplies, hunters and armed militia, Donelson would lead the vessels downriver to the Muscle Shoals where they would look for markers from members of Robertson's overland party, disembark, and set out on a shorter overland trip to French Lick, about 120 miles due north.⁸⁶

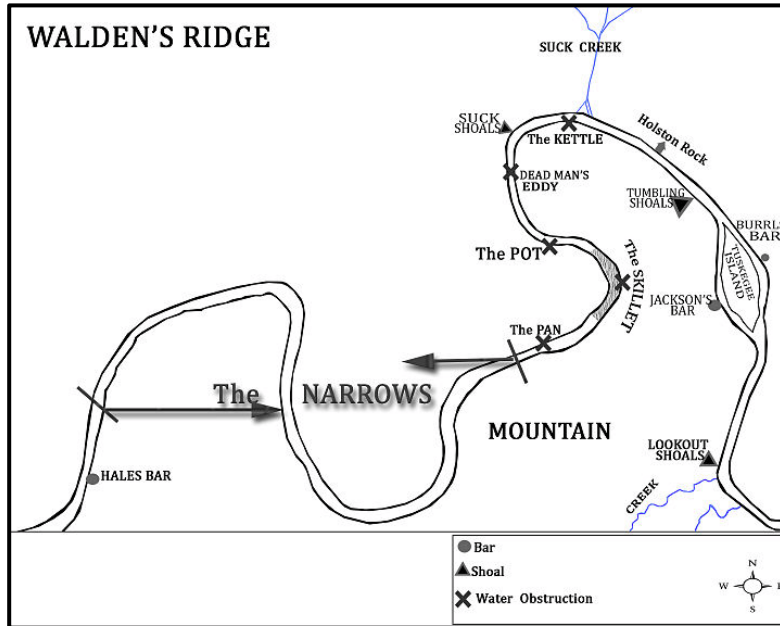
With Donelson in the lead flatboat *Adventure*, the flotilla pushed away on December 22, 1779. Before long a series of misfortunes and delays caused by low water beset the travelers during the winter months. By late February, with rising waters and, Donelson was underway. According to his journal, other vessels, traveling independently, joined them at the mouth of Cloud Creek on the Holston. Almost immediately, the boats ran aground at Poor Valley Shoal where they were grounded for a week in February until rising water freed them. On March 2, the vessels reached the confluence of the Holston with the French Broad River, and a few days later in a preplanned rendezvous they joined up with a party coming down from the Clinch River. The weather was foggy and bitterly cold, a slave on one of the boats dying of exposure on March 6.

They were well armed and among their weapons was a "four pounder" cannon. Yet, as they reached settled tribal territory, the "Chickamauga Cherokee" made several efforts to intercept as they wound through a series of settlements or towns. On Wednesday March 8, one young man was killed by musket fire as his flatboat veered too close to shore, and another boat—traveling in the van of the flotilla because of an outbreak of smallpox among its 28 passengers—was captured by the natives, its captain murdered. Another boat was nearly lost at the "Suck" a vortex also known as "the Kettle" whose infamy was known even to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Washington would later describe it as a "boiling pot."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 11.

⁸⁷ [*Diary of George Washington, from 1789 to 1791, Embracing the Opening of the First Congress and His Tours Through New England, Long Island, and the Southern States. Together with His Journal of a Tour to the Ohio in 1753.*](#) Benson J. Losing, ed. Richmond: Press of the Historical Society, 1861, p. 80

Escaping the marauders at the Suck, the flotilla regrouped, apparently abandoning one bullet-riddled flatboat and redistributing its passengers and payload. An infant, born days before to a Mrs. Peyton whose husband was on the overland trek with Robertson, expired from the trauma of the freezing and wet conditions, but the rest of the flotilla reached the forbidding Muscle Shoals on March 12, where they were fired upon again from the river's banks. The hostile reception allowed only a quick halt and brief and futile search for signs of members of



9 Route of the Donelson Flotilla Down the Tennessee through the Narrows

Robertson's party. The overland group, upon successfully having made the overland trip to French Lick, was to dispatch a party to the planned disembarkation point. Already shaken by their experiences and wary of attempting to travel the 120 miles overland to French Lick, Donelson decided to attempt to run the 37 miles of rapids in the high water. Remarkably, they did so quickly and without incident in some three hours where, in still waters around Florence, they beached their boats and camped—for one night. Thus, the Muscle Shoals briefly accommodated the first large contingent of settlers in the Tennessee Valley.

The story of the Donelson adventure could end here, but for interesting side notes. On March 13, the flotilla set out again, reaching the confluence with the Ohio River seven days later. In the high water conditions of the Ohio, many of the settlers could not endure the prospect of propelling their flatboats upriver against the current to the mouth of the Cumberland, and from there against the current for more days until they reached the party at French Lick. Donelson and party said farewell to several boats that elected to go downriver to the Mississippi and trust their

fortune to the new lands in West Florida, soon to be in the hands of Spain once again. Others, including his daughter and son-in-law elected to settle in Illinois. Donelson wrote: "We will part now, perhaps to meet no more, for I am determined to pursue my course, happen what will."⁸⁸ The journey finally ended on April 24, when the party, exhausted and without provisions—having lived on game for several weeks—finally reached French Salt Lick and the few cabins erected by Robertson and his men. Donelson, writing in his journal, noted matter-of-factly, that "our prospects at present" are dreary." Historians would subsequently draw parallels between the flotilla and Pilgrim's aboard the Mayflower, observing that the families aboard the flatboats that ran the Muscle Shoals would across Tennessee and Alabama become the first aristocracy of the region. Indeed, [Rachael Donelson](#), one of the passengers and daughter of the leader, would one day become the wife of Andrew Jackson.⁸⁹ Her niece, [Mary Donelson](#), would marry [General John Coffee](#), one of Jackson's closest associates.⁹⁰

Alabama Between Peace of Paris and Statehood: 1783 - 1819

The Peace of Paris and the end of the American Revolution. In June 1779, Spain, with covetous eyes on the West Florida lands, had declared war on Great Britain. Striking forcefully against an outmanned and over-extended enemy, [Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid](#), Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez, governor of the Louisiana province, systematically drove the overextended British from Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez in 1779, Mobile in 1780, and Pensacola in 1781. Spain would, for a while, contest the United States for hegemony on the continental stage.

The [Treaty of Paris](#) (September 3, 1783) ended the American Revolution and brought an end to the British presence in the Southeast.

⁸⁸ John Donelson. *John Donelson's Journal. [Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's Permission, in the good boat Adventure, from Fort Patrick Henry on the Holston River to the French Salt-Springs on Cumberland River](#)*. Kept by John Donelson. In *Three Pioneer Tennessee Documents*. Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Commission, 1964. Pp. 1-10.

⁸⁹ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History. A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999](#); Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#) Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p 19; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p.10.

⁹⁰ "[John Coffee](#)". *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed August 31, 2011.

The Mississippi River was recognized as the western boundary of the United States. Canada established the northern boundary. To the south, the 31st parallel separated the United States from Spanish lands.⁹¹ From unorganized territory west of the Appalachians, Congress in 1787 established the [Northwest Territory](#). The territory contained six future states: Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), Michigan (1837), Wisconsin (1848) and Minnesota (1858).

With a look toward the indigenous populations there, an ordinance of Congress in 1786 established an Indian district south of the Ohio River under the jurisdiction of a superintendent who was not appointed until it was formally recognized as the [Southwest Territory](#) in 1790. Its governor, [William Blount](#), was also given the title of Superintendent of Indians. The Southwest Territory would exist until 1796, when it was admitted into the Union as the State of Tennessee with [John Sevier](#) as its first governor. Not until 1792 did the new American government name agents for the various tribes. The ubiquitous [James Robertson](#) assumed the role as agent for the Chickasaw. [Leonard Shaw](#) assumed the same role with the Cherokee and [James Seagrove](#) with the Creeks. One of the aims, to which the Chickasaw responded positively, was to use the agents to recruit Indian support for the campaigns in the Northwest.⁹²

West Florida. After the Treaty of Paris and the departure of the British, the land below the Tennessee Valley, all the way to the Gulf coast, remained a wilderness, lightly populated almost exclusively by native tribes. West Florida was now again in Spanish hands, but with a very small European population insufficiently scaled to assert a strong presence north of the Gulf. Adding to the disarray, in the area above Spanish West Florida, the state of Georgia maintained a claim over most of what became present day Alabama and Mississippi. Spanish machinations, settler speculations, and native manipulations would all become part of the territorial landscape in the years after British departure from the region. Land speculators from

⁹¹ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.39.

⁹²R, S. Cotterill. "[Federal Indian Management in the South 1789-1825](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 20, no. 3 (December 1933), p. 334; "[Southwest Territory](#)." *Tennessee Encyclopedia*. Last accessed February 7, 2026; "[Northwest Territory](#)," *Wikipedia*. Last accessed online, August 8, 2024; "[Southwest Territory](#)," *Wikipedia*. Last accessed online August 8, 2024; "[Tennessee](#)" *Wikipedia*. Last accessed online August 8, 2024.

the U.S. regions, Spanish officials, and indigenous tribal leaders would soon become embroiled in conflicting efforts to control the Tennessee River Valley, with a particular focus on the head of navigation at Muscle Shoals.

Mobile itself suffered decline in the first years of Spanish administration. Foreign commerce lagged, as Spanish policy both forbade all industries in her colonies and did not allow trade with other countries. Even growing agricultural products, like grapes, tobacco or olives, that might prove competitive with Spanish products were disallowed. Adding to tensions, the mouth of the Mobile River was held by the Spanish, and no goods could go up or down river without burdensome tariffs.⁹³

Differences in education policy between the Spanish in Mobile, and American policy in the territories beyond were startling. During the Spanish rule of Mobile, there was no official effort to establish education in any formal way.⁹⁴ From the American congress, in distinctive contrast, came the ordinance of 1785, dividing the western territories into townships made up of 36-640-acre sections, with one section in each township to be set aside for “the maintenance of public schools.”⁹⁵ In the end, the aggressive impulses of the Americans, to own and till the land, to expel the native tribes and the Europeans alike would prevail over the more passive trade mentality of the Europeans.

In West Florida, from Mobile and Pensacola, Spain asserted dominion over the old British lands below the 31st parallel. The lands above to the expanded West Florida boundary remained in dispute, with Spain claiming hegemony to 32°28'. And while the native population in their small regional territory was not significant, through trade in the interior, the Spanish exercised considerable influence among the Creeks and their chief, [Alexander McGillivray](#) (1750-1793). In the years after the 1783 Treaty—attempting to check the aggressive American influx—the Spanish tried to create a broad swath of hostile wilderness, peopled with tribes sympathetic to their cause, between their Louisiana and West Florida lands and the Americans. As Spain attempted to bulk up its own presence

⁹³ Peter J. Hamilton. [*Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821*](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, pp. 271, 293.

⁹⁴ Willis G. Clark. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 26.

⁹⁵ “[Land Ordinance of 1785](#)”. *Wikipedia*. Accessed February 7, 2026

through immigration, the tribes could serve as a military barrier to the Americans, and their fur trade could serve as the basis of the economic development of West Florida and Louisiana.⁹⁶

The effort to use the Creeks to check the relentless advance of the Americans was orchestrated by the Scot, and Tory outcast, [William Panton](#) whose firm, Panton, Leslie & co. traded actively with the Indians from its base in Pensacola.⁹⁷ Panton established strong ties to the leaders among the Creeks, including Alexander (Lachlan's son)—part Creek, part French, and part Scot⁹⁸ Indeed, in 1884, one year after the Treaty of Paris acknowledged American independence, McGillivray concluded a treaty with the Spanish that prohibited whites within Creek lands except those with Spanish credentials.⁹⁹ The company had similar ties with the Choctaw.

Tennessee. In the Tennessee Valley and above, the regional tribes maintained their hostility to American advancement. The settlers who crossed the mountains and took up residence in the old *Indian Reserve* were vitally concerned about continued violence and hostility and were willing to consider any option to subdue or subjugate the tribes. Initial United States policy seemed to support the native cause. The first [Treaty of Hopewell](#) in 1785 stipulated that white intruders in Cherokee lands did not enjoy U. S. protection and could be punished according to Cherokee determination. A limited right of travel in Cherokee territory was not established until 1791, and even then, the requirement to carry a “passport” was stipulated. Following the murder of uncredentialed whites in Cherokee territory that year, the North Carolina legislature protested what it declared to be federal infringements on state rights. The protest went unheeded, and there were no similar claims from among the states for the next forty years. Negotiations with the Indian tribes came to be regarded as a federal prerogative.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ A. P. Whitaker. “[Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest: An Episode. 1788-89](#)”. *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1925), pp. 155-176

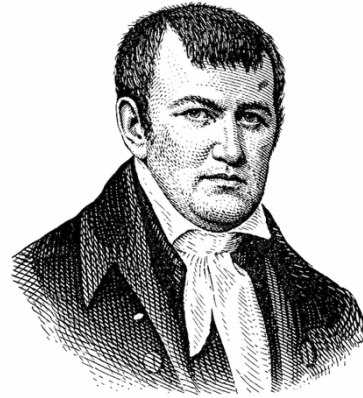
⁹⁷ Watson, Thomas Davis. [Merchant Adventurer in the Old Southwest: William Panton the Spanish Years](#). Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1972

⁹⁸ Henderson, W. A. [Alexander McGillivray: The Last King of the Creeks](#). Atlanta: Foote & Davis Company, 1903.

⁹⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 17; Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ A. A. Putnam. [History of Middle Tennessee or Life and Times of General James Robertson](#). Nashville TN: printed for the author, 1859, p. 240.

Nevertheless, the settlers continued to apply every possible option that could shield them from native predation as they built their farms, grew their population and readied their own self-defenses. Viewing U. S. tribal policy as too gradual, they looked to achieve peace and land cessions through their own dealings with the Cherokee and others, through arrangements with Georgia and the Carolina states (whose interests could, and did, diverge from that of the young nation) or via intrigues with the only foreign power in the region, Spain. After settling in Nashville after his river odyssey, John Donelson would return to Muscle Shoals three times between 1780 and 1785. Over the next several years, Muscle Shoals would be at the epicenter of private speculative ventures, the target of acquisition of a failed new state, and the focus of intrigue with a foreign government.



10 James Robertson Nashville co-founder

In the first few years of Nashville's existence, as the farms and cabins multiplied, violence was an everyday occurrence. During the first 15 years of its existence, one of the settlers would be lost to Indian violence every ten days within a radius of seven miles of that settlement.¹⁰¹ James Robertson lost two sons and two brothers during the bloody interval of frontier expansion. The death of his son Peyton and his brother John occurred just months apart in 1787. In March 12-year-old Peyton and a neighbor boy were killed while working at a sugar camp near the family farm in Nashville. The boys were attacked by a party of Chickamauga Cherokee (accompanied by French traders according to some accounts). Peyton's mother heard the screams and released the family hounds to drive the attackers away, but she was too late to save the boys.¹⁰² Only three months later, James' brother John was killed near the Robertson home.¹⁰³ But the frontiersman's desire for the lands was not quenched by tribal raids or treaty terms that fixed the northern boundary of the

¹⁰¹ James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [*Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies*](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, p. 34.

¹⁰² Albright, Edward. [*History of Middle Tennessee or Life and Times of General James Robertson*](#). Nashville: A. W. Putnam. Printed for the author. 1859, p. 295.

¹⁰³ Williams, Samuel Cole. [*History of the Lost State of Franklin*](#). Johnson City, TN: Watauga Press, 1924, p. 166.

Cherokee lands far above the Tennessee River, intended to keep the Cumberland settlers from the river.¹⁰⁴

The Destruction of Oka Kapassa, 1787. At the foot of the Muscle Shoals, not visible from the Tennessee River, and up a creek near what is now present day Tuscumbia, a Cherokee settlement had been established, in part to protect a cache of trade goods bought there by the French traders from the Wabash in the Illinois territory, and in part to launch forays against the settlers now relentlessly approaching the Tennessee River from the north and east. Spanish traders from Florida also found haven there at the secluded site.¹⁰⁵

Both to conceal the trade goods and to conceal themselves from retaliation by the settlers, Oka Kappasa, or Cold Water, was a sort of secret city, not revealed even to the nearby Chickasaw. The village drew its name from the abundant water flowing from the limestone there. There are suggestions that the traders, perhaps with Spanish connivance, fostered and rewarded the raids against the Cumberland settlers. The presence of the base of operations became first an annoyance and then a target for eradication by the settlers. And when the Chickasaw learned of its location, and disclosed to Robertson its location, plans were developed for its destruction.¹⁰⁶ The defensive posture of the settlers became aggressively offensive.

In 1787, Col. Robertson and 130 armed men from the Cumberland settlements, led by Chickasaw guides, attacked and destroyed Oka Kapassa. Swimming their horses across the river, and leaving skirmishers to protect the north bank, the militia struck quickly. Some of the Chickamauga Cherokee escaped by fleeing into the woodlands, others

¹⁰⁴ A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 372. From [Wikipedia](#): "Three agreements, each known as a **Treaty of Hopewell**, were signed between representatives of the [Congress](#) of the United States and the [Cherokee](#), [Choctaw](#), and [Chickasaw](#) peoples. They were negotiated and signed at the [Hopewell](#) plantation in [South Carolina](#) over 45 days during the winter of 1785–86."

¹⁰⁵ Finger, J. R. [Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition](#). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 119.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Albritt. [Early History of Middle Tennessee](#). Nashville: Brandon Printing Company, 1909 p. 132; Albert James Pickett. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period](#). [with] Thomas McAdory Owen. Annals of Alabama 1819-1900. Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, p.74; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 2, 1921, p. 1092.

rushed to their canoes, only to be cut down by the sharpshooters deployed on the other bank. More than 25 natives were killed, along with three of the French traders who camped there, and one of their wives. Their trade goods were confiscated. Robertson lost none of his militia, and the ruthlessness of the action set a tone for settler actions in the period.¹⁰⁷

On July 10, 1787, Alexander McGillivray wrote to [Arturo O'Neill](#), Governor of Spanish West Florida, of the massacre at Oka Kapassa:

*...five days ago, I received the Second Notice that the Americans of Cumberland had attacked and killed most of the French traders that used to trade up the Cherokee River, together with some of our Indians and Cherokees are likewise killed. In consequence of this affair, I have sent off between five and six hundred warriors under approved leaders to go and raid the settlement of Cumberland and destroy their houses and plantations.*¹⁰⁸

From Nashville, James Robertson was acutely aware of the role that McGillivray played in the “no-man’s land” between the Americans and the Spanish, and in one letter in 1788, informed him of a fine rifle he was sending as a gift. He informed him of a city lot in Nashville deeded in his name and offered additional tracts of land if McGillivray would elect to come live “in our young country.”¹⁰⁹ Cast in polite language, Robertson’s message was clear: the settlers would give no quarter to further resistance.

The Chickasaw. The role of the Chickasaw in the destruction of Oka Kapassa derived from new ties between the United States government and that tribe. For even as John Donelson and company had been negotiating with the Cherokee, the Chickasaw were ceding to the U. S. a swath of land five miles in diameter for a trading post. By the Chickasaw [Treaty of Hopewell](#), January 10, 1786, the United States promised protection to the Chickasaw in response to the acknowledgement of U. S.

¹⁰⁷ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 2; Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. [From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932, p. 95; Atkinson, James R. [Splendid Land, Splendid People. The Chickasaw Indians to Removal](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003, p. 136; Durham, W. T. *Before Tennessee 1790-1796: A Narrative History of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio*. Piney Flats TN: Rocky Mount Historical Association, 1990, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁸ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Putnam, A. W., [“Alexander McGillivray – The Creek Chief.”](#) *The American Historical Magazine* Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 1899), p. 304.

hegemony and a pledge to restore all prisoners, slaves, and property. At the same time, echoing the agreement with the Chickasaw, the U. S. agreed that no citizen would be allowed to settle on Indian lands, and if they did the Chickasaw could punish them as they pleased. While similar treaties were signed with the Cherokee and the Choctaw, the Cherokee treaty allowed for the U. S. to open a trading post on the Tennessee very close to Oka Kapassa. Now, with the destruction of the latter, the dominance of the Chickasaw in the Muscle Shoals area was virtually assured. The Chickasaw would remain close allies until their own removal some forty years later.¹¹⁰

Speculators, Scoundrels and Scalawags: Land Speculation in the Tennessee Valley

From the time of the creation of the Indian territory south of the Ohio River until statehood, the Tennessee Valley portion of what would become in 1819 the state of Alabama was the site of endless speculation, a charade with almost too many characters to track. The rampant efforts at land-grabbling have sparked the wonderment and bemusement of historians through the decades.¹¹¹ This section attempts to identify the many different, speculators, scoundrels and scalawags who would attempt to appropriate the territory where property rights were unclear, unestablished or contested for their own benefit. From 1785 until the creation of the federally controlled Mississippi Territory and the assertion of federal authority over the dispensation of lands occupied by indigenous tribes and claimed by southern states, the Muscle Shoals area would see speculator after speculator attempt to take control of the area for personal enrichment.

Houston Country Speculation, 1785-1786. Having seen Muscle Shoals firsthand, John Donelson and his business partners formed a company to purchase the vast lands around Muscle Shoals for settlement.

¹¹⁰ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 15.

¹¹¹ Haskins, Charles Homer. [*The Yazoo Land Companies*](#). Reprinted from *The Papers of the American Historical Association*, October 1891. New York: The Rochester Press, 1891; Hobson, Charles F. "The Yazoo Land Sales Case (*Fletcher v. Peck*: 1810). *Journal of Supreme Court History* (November 2017); Kennedy, Brenden, Edward. "[Mississippi Stocks and the 1795 Yazoo Land Sale: Slavery, Securities Markets, Native American Dispossession, and the Panic of 1819 in Alabama](#)," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July 2021), pp. 203-239; Heath, William Estill. "[The Yazoo Land Fraud](#)." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 1932), pp. 274-191.

[Joseph Martin](#), one of Virginia's Indian agents, and [John Sevier](#), then colonel of the Washington County Militia on the Holston River, joined him. Other powerful members included [William Blount](#), a North Carolina member of Congress, [Richard Caswell](#), and [Griffith Rutherford](#). Rutherford was a general during the Revolutionary War. Caswell was at the time speaker of the North Carolina Senate and later governor.¹¹²

Taking a page out of Henderson's book, the speculators purchased, for \$5,000 in trade goods, the land around Muscle Shoals from local tribesmen. In 1785, the company dispatched a company of as many as 300 men in some reports and began the preparations for setting up a land office for the purpose of selling land to would-be settlers there.¹¹³

Determining the shoals to be within the ownership of Georgia, the speculators presented their claim to the Georgia legislature, asking it to create the County of Houston along the north side of the Tennessee River, including the land adjacent to Muscle Shoals northward to the North Carolina boundary. The vast land grant created by the Georgia legislature in December 1785 would encompass the subsequent Alabama counties of Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison and Jackson. However, the initiative was shortly overturned by the legislature for various reasons, including the rise of the Free State of Franklin, the opposition of the local tribes, and Georgia's ratification of the U.S. constitution, which introduced a stronger role of the federal government in regional Indian policy¹¹⁴.

The Creek chieftain McGillivray reportedly visited the region to make certain the speculators had departed and destroyed the minor evidence of their brief presence.¹¹⁵ Auturo O'Neill, who became the

¹¹² Whitaker, A. P. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 385, pp 366-7; "Yazoo Land Deed." *Archives Space Public Interface*, University of Tennessee Libraries. Online. Accessed February 12, 2026.

¹¹³ W. B. Wood. [Historical Address of Hon. Wm. B. Wood, July 4, 1876](#). As published in the *Florence Gazette July to September 1876*, Accessed February 8, 2026

¹¹⁴ Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. [From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932, p. 66 Driver, Carl Samuel. [John Sevier, Pioneer of the Old Southwest](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932, pp. 33, 70-72.; A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 370; "[Alabama: Commentary](#)". *Alabama Atlas of Historical County Boundaries*. The Newberry Library: 2007. Online. Accessed February 8, 2026

¹¹⁵ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, pp. 11-12; Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934; Willis Brewer. *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872*. Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872, p. 24;

Spanish governor of West Florida in 1781, had followed the foiled efforts of the Cumberland adventurers at Muscle Shoals closely. In August 1786 he wrote with obvious satisfaction that the “Carolinians” had been dealt with decisively at “Mossel Cholls.”¹¹⁶ But speculator’s gambit was only the first instance of land speculation in the Valley. John Donelson would soon die, mysteriously, but the redoubtable John Sevier never relinquished the vision of a settled and developed Muscle Shoals. The reasons for the persistence were obvious. For at the impediment to navigation along the Tennessee was the opportunity for a port and trading center that allowed vessels to move to the Holston and French Broad rivers in the one direction and to the Ohio, Cumberland, Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the other. Also, often used by Indians and traders in the past was the relatively short portage from Bear Creek on the Tennessee River to the headwaters of the Tombigbee to Mobile and the Gulf.¹¹⁷ Rampant speculation would be a feature of the Shoals portion of the Tennessee Valley for some time to come.

Free State of Franklin: 1784-1787. Subsequently, the new state of [Franklin](#), a 1784 breakaway movement of several North Carolina counties, moved to the center stage of the Muscle Shoals intrigue. The ever-present John Sevier would become Franklin’s governor, and it petitioned the U. S. for statehood in 1785¹¹⁸ For the Cumberland settlers of the short-lived state of Franklin, Muscle Shoals may have been seen as the key to its prosperity. A letter printed in the *Pennsylvania Journal* sheds light on the connection:

If I was to venture a conjecture, the good of the commonwealth is not at the bottom, but the views of a few crafty land-jobbers, whom you know, who are aiming at purchasing the great bent of Tenasee from the Indians, and if not

Albert James Pickett. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period](#). [with] Thomas McAdory Owen. Annals of Alabama 1819-1900. Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, p. 68.

¹¹⁶ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ Whitaker, A. P. “[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)”. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 385, pp 365-386

¹¹⁸ Eschner, Kat. “[The True Story of the Short-lived State of Franklin.](#)” *American South: A Smithsonian Magazine Special Report*. *Smithsonian Magazine*. April 23, 2017. Online. Accessed February 8, 2026 “State of Franklin,” *Wikipedia*. Last accessed, August 8, 2024.

*successful that way, to contrive a quarrel, and drive the natives (Cortez-like) out by force.*¹¹⁹

The Franklin speculators intended to settle both sides of the Tennessee River in the Muscle Shoals area and actively promoted the force of arms from both North Carolina and Georgia to achieve their goal, which had as strategic goals the further degradation of tribal influence and direct trade access through West Florida to New Orleans and Mobile.¹²⁰

The Cherokee, Creek and Chickasaw tribes were incensed over the encroachment upon and steady compression of their ancient common hunting lands, and in a masterful letter delivered in September 1785 to a United States Commissioner for Indian Affairs, McGillivray observed that Spain had been accommodating in agreeing to observe the status quo of the former *Indian Reserve* established by King George of Great Britain, and had been generous in allowing them access to the ports of Mobile and Pensacola. He warned the tribes would not look kindly upon negotiations between the United States and Spain that would adversely impact the rights of the tribes to move freely in the Reserve.

*We shall pay no attention to any limits that may prejudice our claims. . . . We want nothing from you but justice. We want our hunting-grounds preserved from encroachments. They have been ours since the beginning of time, and I trust that, with the assistance of our friends, we shall be able to maintain them against every attempt that may be made to take them from us.*¹²¹

For the most part, the tribes took no hostile actions until the next year. But the unremitting pressures from the Americans would continue— and Spain was the counterpoise to whom the tribes turned.

In April 1786, war erupted between Georgia and the Creeks. To subdue the tribe, Georgia turned to the Franklin citizens and offered land

¹¹⁹ Letter from a correspondent in the western territory to a colleague in Virginia, December 20, 1784, and published in the *Journal*, February 5, 1785. In A. P. Whitaker. “[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#).” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 371.

¹²⁰ A. P. Whitaker.” [The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)”. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 374

¹²¹ Letter from Alexander McGillivray to Andrew Pickens, September 5, 1785. In Albert James Pickett. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period](#). [with] Thomas McAdory Owen. Annals of Alabama 1819-1900. Birmingham, AL: The Webb Book Company. 1900, pp. 63-65.

grants at Muscle Shoals in return for a militia of 1,500 men. But no joint operation occurred and in 1787, when the U. S. Constitution was submitted to the states for ratification, Georgia accepted it, choosing a federal management of the indigenous question and a more gradual solution to the frontier tensions. Franklin was not admitted to statehood.¹²² The Franklin speculation in the Shoals likewise came to an end.

Spanish Speculation in the Shoals. Foiled by the United States, with the Houston County initiative moribund, and their prospective state of Franklin stillborn, the frustrated speculators turned to Spain. And Spain would entertain both the Creeks and the speculators to gain advantage against the Americans. John Sevier and his colleagues actively sought to engage the Spanish government in their Tennessee Valley scheme, and at least at some levels, achieved uptake. [Don Diego de Gardoqui](#), the Spanish envoy to the United States, initially listened to and fostered their Muscle Shoals scheme. Sevier, still leading the speculators, promised allegiance to Spain in return for money and munitions and subjugation of the restive Creeks.¹²³ The conspirators argued that Muscle Shoals and the desired territory was near and perhaps even within the disputed boundaries of the Spanish settlement with the United States, and that the Franklin alliance would enable Spain to secure the boundary settlement it desired. The United States, they argued was too weak to prevent the scheme.

The plan was too flawed to succeed. For [Esteban Rodríguez Miro](#), Governor of Louisiana, the tribes were the mainstay of the Spanish presence in the region increasingly pressured by the American advance. The crux of John Sevier's proposal, which included pacification and subjugation of the tribal strength in the Cumberland-Muscle Shoals region, was counter to that strategy. By 1789, the Spanish engaged in the discussions elected to back fully away from the scheme and protect their own West Florida interests from the avarice of the American speculators¹²⁴ With the failure of the Spanish intrigue, the goal of Robertson and other

¹²² A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 375.

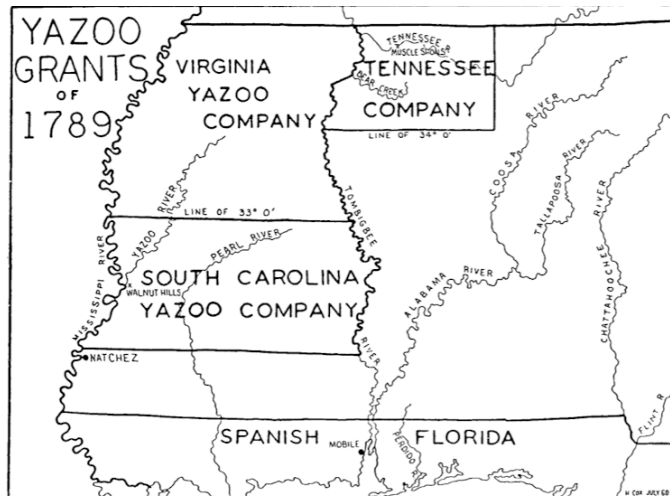
¹²³ A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, pp. 379-385

¹²⁴ W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale](#), p. 213; A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 379; A. P. Whitaker. "[Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest: An Episode. 1788-89](#)". *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1925), pp. 161-162.

leaders of the lightly populated Cumberland region—who may not have numbered more than 4,000 in all the settlements—was to achieve with McGillivray and other tribal leaders, cessation of the violence. In a letter to Governor Miro, September 2, 1789, Robertson complained of his small colony's vulnerability: "Unprotected, we are to be obedient to the new Congress of the United States, but we cannot wish for a more interesting connection. The United States afford us no protection."¹²⁵ James Robertson and [Daniel Smith](#), having seen the Spanish intrigue fade, sought to press North Carolina to cede its claims to the United States, and thus to bring themselves more fully under the U. S. protective umbrella. By 1790, both John Sevier and James Robertson would become officials of the government in the Southwest Territory and, as the federalists they had become, would themselves support the growing voices of detachment of the Louisiana and West Florida lands from Spain.¹²⁶

The Muscle Shoals Speculation, 1789-1798: The Yazoo Land Frauds

When George Washington became President of the new United States [in 1789](#) indigenous tribes still controlled at least half of the nation's territory south of the Ohio River. Almost all of Mississippi and Alabama, great portions of Georgia and Tennessee, Kentucky west of the Cumberlands, and the mountain regions of the Carolinas were controlled by the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes. And all of them, to greater or lesser degree, were hostile to the steady pressures of



¹¹ The Yazoo Speculation, 1789

¹²⁵ Papeles de Cuba, Leg. 2370, Robertson to Miro, September 2, 1789, in A. P. Whitaker. "[Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest: An Episode. 1788-89](#)". *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1925), pp. 172.

¹²⁶ A. P. Whitaker. "[Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest: An Episode. 1788-89](#)". *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1925), p. 174.

settlers upon the region.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the efforts to obtain the ownership of the Muscle Shoals region continued into his first administration.

Zachariah Cox (1765-1838). It was [Zachariah Cox](#), Virginia- born speculator and land surveyor, who next donned the mantle of speculation. The Muscle Shoals region still loomed large in the imagination of Americans along the Appalachians and the Cumberland. Working for John Sevier and other Tennessee leaders, Cox had an active hand in identifying for settlement, fertile parts of the Tennessee Valley, and was present at the Shoals in the 1785 Houston County venture. In 1789, now ensconced as an assistant clerk in the Georgia House of Representatives, he persuaded the legislature to approve a settlement north and south of the Tennessee at the Shoals. He and partners in the Yazoo Tennessee Company, including John Sevier and William Blount, made a massive purchase of 3.5 million acres of land from Georgia in the vicinity of Muscle Shoals at a price of some \$47,000. Publishing a notice in the region inviting settlers to join them there, he built a small fort and opened a trading post in 1791.¹²⁸ With its purchase of the vast acreage in North Alabama, the Tennessee Company effectively laid claim to what are now the counties of Cherokee, Colbert, DeKalb, Franklin, Jackson, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, and Morgan counties, as well as parts of Marion, Walker, and Blount. With the U. S. contesting Georgia's authority to make the Tennessee Company deal, Cox and a small advance party made their way to Muscle Shoals to inspect their property, with an armed flotilla of prospective settlers purportedly in their van. Evidently, Cox did not anticipate that the land would be settled amicably.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ R. S. Cotterill. "[Federal Indian Management in the South 1789-1825](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 20, no. 3 (December 1933), p. 333.

¹²⁸ Durham, W. T. *Before Tennessee 1790-1796: A Narrative History of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio*. Piney Flats TN: Rocky Mount Historical Association, 1990, pp. 50-51. "[Zachariah Cox.](#)" *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed February 11, 2026; Haskins, Charles Homer. [The Yazoo Land Companies](#). Reprinted from *The Papers of the American Historical Association*, October 1891. New York: The Rochester Press, 1891; Adams, Samuel B. "[The Yazoo Fraud](#)," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (June 1923), pp. 155 – 165; Durham, W. T. *Before Tennessee 1790-1796: A Narrative History of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio*. Piney Flats TN: Rocky Mount Historical Association. 1990, p. 14.

¹²⁹ Vicki Rozema. [Footsteps of the Cherokees: A guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation](#) Winston-Salem NC: John F. Blair, 2007, p. 78; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History*

The United States and North Carolina both railed against the Georgians for their actions, and the Governor of North Carolina wrote to agents and employees of the Yazoo Tennessee Land Company warning them that he personally would notify the local tribes of the impending intrusion and would assure them that whatever their actions might be, they would provoke no reaction from the United States. The U. S. Secretary of War added his own voice of disapproval. President George Washington reprimanded Cox for violating federal Indian land policy.¹³⁰ Cox finally lost control of the Tennessee Company in 1803, and legal troubles would plague him until his death in 1838. But the deed books of the early days, show Cox as the owner of numerous tracts in the North Alabama counties and certain current state boundaries can be traced to the land grants of the Tennessee Company.¹³¹

Alexander McGillivray. Alexander McGillivray, who has been called the region's Talleyrand, epitomizes in his own life the exquisite formative history of the region. His origins go back to Fort Toulouse, the French outpost on the Coosa. There, a captain in the French army, Marchand, married a Creek woman of royal stature. One of the children of that marriage was a daughter, Sehoy, who was renowned for her beauty. In 1735, Lachlan McGillivray, a Scot tradesman and himself the scion of a wealthy family, made his way to the Creek country, married [Sehoy](#), and set up his trading concern at Little Talasi, on the Coosa, near present day Wetumpka. Alexander was their child and was educated in



12 Alexander McGillivray circa 1790

of Lauderdale County, Alabama. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, pp. 18, 21; "[Zachariah Cox](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Last accessed online, 8 August 2024.

¹³⁰ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.43

¹³¹ "[Zachariah Cox](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Last accessed online, 8 August 2024.

Charleston. Upon his father's return to Scotland, Alexander returned to his Creek roots and quickly became the acknowledged leader of his tribe.¹³²

In 1790, President Washington invited McGillivray and other Creek leaders to New York. On August 7, 1790, meeting with Secretary of War Henry Knox, he signed the [Treaty of New York](#) with the United States. Like the earlier [Hopewell Treaty](#) with the Chickasaw, the treaty placed the Creeks and Seminoles under American protection. In exchange for land cessions, the Treaty of New York settled disputes with the Georgians by accepting the extent of the Georgian land claims to 2/3s of the Creek lands along with the promise to encroach no further. McGillivray was given appointment as an American agent with the rank of brigadier general and payment of a \$1,500 annual salary. McGillivray also agreed to make no further treaties with the Spanish. But, as intrusions upon tribal land would not stop, his intrigues with Spain continued, fomenting further Cherokee and Creek actions against the Cumberland intruders.¹³³

McGillivray had a hand in the collapse of the Zachariah Cox enterprise. When Cox and his small party arrived at Muscle Shoals in 1791 and immediately set about building the fortified blockhouse and trading post, the native response was swift. McGillivray, determined to protect Cherokee and Chickasaw hunting grounds, vowed to return to the area and join with the locals in defending against the intrusion.

In a letter McGillivray exulted over the news that one boat load of prospective settlers enroute to the shoals, with many men aboard, had been intercepted and 27 of the travelers murdered. At the Shoals, Cox and his party were confronted by an Indian party three times their size and wisely withdrew. Both Governor Miro and McGillivray may have had hands in orchestrating the confrontation. The structures on the island were dismantled and burned.¹³⁴ Cox would reappear during the unfolding of the

¹³² Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 66; Hodge, Frederick Webb, Ed. [Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico](#). Part I. In Two Parts. Bulletin 30. Bureau of American Ethnology. Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1912, 781-782.

¹³³ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, pp. 18-19; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.40

¹³⁴ Jill Knight Garrett. A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, pp. 19; William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 140; Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of](#)

second Yazoo land fraud in 1795. That gambit would result in the ouster of the Georgia legislature and reform legislation that declared the 1795 land act void. Cox's enterprises finally collapsed altogether.¹³⁵ While the speculators failed in their speculative schemes, the resulting debt attributable to their scheme and lingering legal issues that would make their way to the Supreme Court would hover over the region for some time.

McGillivray died in 1793, but that did not end the intrigues. Power passed largely to other wealthy biracial leaders who could navigate the cultural chasm between the Americans and the tribesmen. Two of his nephews [William Weatherford](#) and [William McIntosh](#) would fight on opposite sides of the forthcoming Creek war.¹³⁶

[Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 18; A. P. Whitaker. "[The Muscle Shoals Speculation](#)". *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XIII, p. 385; "[Zachariah Cox](#)". Alabama Encyclopedia. Online. Accessed August 31, 2011

¹³⁵ [Zachariah Cox](#). *Alabama Encyclopedia*. Online. Accessed August 31, 2011; Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.16.

¹³⁶ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 67.

Federal Land Policy and Seizure of Indian Lands.

With the collapse of the Yazoo ventures and the failure of the Cox effort, the implementation of federal Indian land policy began to be felt in



the region. United States land policy had opened the door to a trickle of adventurers when, in [1786](#), [General Andrew Pickens](#), [Benjamin Hawkins](#), and [Joseph Martin](#) confirmed a cession by the Choctaw of the land previously obtained from them by the British in 1765 along the Tombigbee. There, land title was obtainable, and the occasional settler would take a family through the intervening wilds from the eastern seaboard to this rough far back country.¹³⁷

Above Mobile a settlement region grew up upon the Tombigbee around old [St. Stephens](#), where the Spanish established a trading

outpost around 1790. Traveling overland through the Creek country, Georgians had settled there around 1777, perhaps the first settlement in

¹³⁷ Willis Brewer. Brewer, Willis. [Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872](#). Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872 p. 24

Alabama. By 1790, when the trading post was built, some 200 white settlers, mostly Americans, and 100 slaves were living there.¹³⁸ With the solidification of the U.S. presence in the region, the diminution of the indigenous presence by treaty and force of arms would accelerate.¹³⁹

In the South, U. S. policy gradually conditioned the tribes to accept a growing presence of settlers into the region, shrinking their own lands through cessions as the migration swelled. To accomplish that end, the U.S. government and its agents pursued a series of treaties and land purchases, extending settler land and access and compressing indigenous domain. Part and parcel of that strategy of *conditional assimilation* was to encourage agriculture within the tribal lands to reduce the dependency upon hunting and gathering. A new agrarian lifestyle, and the readiness to live alongside white settlers would free more land for purchase.¹⁴⁰ Slaveholding among the Indians was allowed and a series of stores and depots trading farming implements and other essential were opened by agents across the region. Credit was generously extended, the more easily to convert tribal debt into land cessions. The 1790 Treaty of New York, for example, sought to achieve the transformation of the Indian culture through the trader economy:

*That the Creek nation may be led to a greater degree of civilization, and to become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters, the United States will from time to time furnish gratuitously the said nation with useful domestic animals and implements of husbandry.*¹⁴¹

Time was the only defense of the tribes against the gradual unfolding of this strategy, and a string of violent reactions still lay in the future.

Tribal Agents. During the early years of government policy, it was the practice to assign an agent to each tribe who acted as intermediary

¹³⁸ Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913, pp. 11-12. Google Books

¹³⁹ “[Southwest Territory](#)”. *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed September 1, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 37.

¹⁴¹ Article 12 of the Treaty of New York, cited by Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 37. See also [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements and Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services.

between the Indians on the one hand and traders and settlers on the other. They offered instruction in agriculture and crafts. Settlers and tradesmen required permits to live among the tribes, and preference was usually given to blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters, and others. Steadily, natives would also pick up the skills of the crafts and begin themselves to assist in the construction of mills, cotton gins, ferryboats, and other implements of industry. They also acclimated to agriculture, many leaving the villages to live on farms where they grew cotton and other crops. Facility with plow, spinning wheel and loom became common. In 1825, among the Cherokee, one writer reported there were among 15,000 Cherokee: 1,500 slaves, 22,000 head of cattle, ten sawmills, 31 grist mills, 18 ferries, 18 schools and 8 cotton gins. In the end, assimilation would be sacrificed on the altar of expediency. The thirst of white settlers for Indian land would bring the policy of accommodation to an end—a process that unfolded with startling speed.¹⁴²

In 1791, the modest [Treaty of Holston](#) was signed between the United States and the Cherokee. It was the first important treaty with a southern Indian nation after the adoption of the U. S. Constitution in 1789.¹⁴³ While a small cession of land was obtained, more important were the conditions that allowed for the unimpeded right of travel from the Washington capitol to the so-called “Mero District” in Tennessee. Additionally, unimpeded navigation rights to the Tennessee River itself were guaranteed by the tribe. Reciprocally, it defined the boundaries of the Cherokee lands, preserved the notion of tribal hunting grounds between the Cumberland settlements and those on the Holston. The treaties of both 1785 ([Hopewell](#)) and 1791 (Holston) contained stipulations requiring passports for travel in the Cherokee lands and gave the tribe to right to punish trespassers, who entered the lands illegally, according to Cherokee law.¹⁴⁴ The repeated violations of the restriction, led to steadily

¹⁴² Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, pp. 12-13

¹⁴³ Seymour Dunbar. *A History of Travel in America*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. Vol. II. 1915, p. 491. Internet Archive; “[Treaty with the Cherokee, 1791.](#)” [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements and Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services. Online. Accessed February 12, 2026.

¹⁴⁴ Vicki Rozema. [Footsteps of the Cherokees: A guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation](#). Winston-Salem NC: John F. Blair, 2007, p. 28; Seymour Dunbar. [A History of Travel in America](#). Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. Vol. II. 1915, p. 491.

heightened tensions and the death of many trespassers. But the treaty further advanced the immigrant foothold in the region. On land ceded by the Cherokee, William Blount, Governor of the Southwest Territory, began construction of the city of [Knoxville](#) that year.¹⁴⁵

Incorporated in 1794, Knoxville would become a staging area for the migration whose volume increased annually. Michaux describes the city he saw in his travels that year:

... the seat of government of the State of Tennessee, is situated on the river Holston, which, at this place, is 150 fathoms in width. The houses, in number about 200, are, almost all, of wood. Although it has been built eighteen or twenty years, this little town has not yet any kind of establishment or manufactory, except some tanneries. Commerce, however, is brisker here than at Nashville. The stores, of which there are fifteen or twenty, are also better provided. The merchants obtain their supplies by land, from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond, in Virginia, and, in return, send, by the same channel, the productions of the country, which they buy from the farmers, or take in exchange for their goods. Baltimore and Richmond are the towns with which they have the greatest dealings. The price of carriage from Baltimore is six or seven dollars the quintal. It is reckoned 500 miles from this town to Knoxville; 640 to Philadelphia; and 420 to Richmond.

*They also send flour, cotton, and lime, to New Orleans, by the river Tennessee; but this method is not much used, the navigation of this river being very much interrupted, in two different places, by shoals and rocks. It is reckoned about 600 miles from Knoxville to the efflux of the Tennessee into the Ohio, and 38 miles from thence to that of the Ohio, into the Mississippi.*¹⁴⁶

The trappings of civil society followed in the van. [Blount College](#), the first college in the state (and the future University of Tennessee), was established in Knoxville that year, 1794.¹⁴⁷

Native Hostilities. About this time, the Cherokee Indian chief, [Double Head](#), replaced the ravaged Oka Kapassa with a new village somewhat further west, near the later location of George Colbert's ferry crossing. Double Head himself was the brother of Old Tassel, who had been killed by settler vigilantes in 1788. He directed raids against the settlers in 1791 the

¹⁴⁵ Theodore Roosevelt. [The Winning of the West. Volume Four. Louisiana and the Northwest, 1791-1807](#). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896, p. 106. Internet Archive; Durham, W. T. *Before Tennessee 1790-1796: A Narrative History of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio*. Piney Flats TN: Rocky Mount Historical Association, 1990, p.70.

¹⁴⁶ François André Michaux. [Travels to the Westward of the Allegany Mountains](#). Translated from the French. London: Richard Phillips, 1805., p. 89. Internet Archive.

¹⁴⁷ "[University of Tennessee](#)". *Wikipedia*. Accessed September 1, 2011

Nashville area, and his raiders killed at least one settler there. A paper prepared by the Territorial House of Representatives in 1794 reported that 200 persons were killed in the area since the 1791 attacks. Tied down in the tribal battles in the Northwest Territory, the U. S. was unable to immediately respond to the threats.¹⁴⁸

As the Creeks and Cherokee bridled against the incursions and continued their hostile activities, the Chickasaw were moving in the other direction, forming alliances with the Americans that markedly enhanced the dominance of that small tribe. In 1792, George Colbert led his Chickasaw warriors from the banks of the Tennessee northwards, where they allied with the American General St. Clair in his campaign against the northern tribes. The Chickasaw contribution to the success of the campaign earned the gratitude of President Washington who in 1794 hosted the Chickasaw chieftains in Philadelphia and shipped many tokens of the government's appreciation to the new city of Knoxville, where Colbert and tribe picked them up and transported them downriver, through the shoals, to the settlement at the mouth of Bear Creek. As had been the case with McGilvery, among the gifts showered on George Colbert and the Chickasaw was a promised annual stipend of \$3,000.¹⁴⁹ There is a charming letter, written far later, that one of the prizes of that encounter between Colbert and Washington was the first iron mattock for working the ground that George Colbert himself packed on his pony and brought it back to Bear Creek.¹⁵⁰ |

In 1795, the citizens of Nashville welcomed the Colberts and 70 Chickasaw warriors to the city where they were feted for their role in routing a Creek raiding party headed toward that still-beleaguered city. That same year, the tribe played a key role in halting Cherokee advances downriver on the Tennessee. And for that, they received additional

¹⁴⁸ Pat Alderman, et. al. [*The Overmountain Men: Battle of King's Mountain, Cumberland decade, State of Franklin, Southwest Territory*](#). Johnson City TN: Overmountain Press, 1986. Originally published 1970, p. 274.

¹⁴⁹ Nina Leftwich. [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times*](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵⁰ [*Letter, T. C. Stuart to his brother, September 7, 1861*](#). In George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina*. Vol. II. Columbia SC: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell, 1883. p. 442. (Author's note: in the accounts of the U. S. War Department, dated February 1, 1800, is a listing of the "sundry" articles sent to Colbert and the Chickasaw. Listed among those items is the mattock). <https://wardepartmentpapers.org/scripto/s/home/1/1/73683/media>).

rewards and accolades from the U. S. government.¹⁵¹ Slowly, passage on the Tennessee River became more secure. By June of that year, four heavily laden boats made the trip from the vicinity of Knoxville to Nashville; 3 more made the longer voyage to New Orleans.¹⁵²

George Colbert. [George Colbert](#) (1764-1839) was the second oldest son of [James Logan Colbert](#), a trader who, from as early as 1767, lived among the Chickasaw, James Logan became affluent in his own right, and his wealth allowed George and his brothers to dominate Chickasaw affairs through the time of removal of the tribe from their homeland. By 1780, the father himself was said to own 150 slaves—testament to the extent of the slave trade at the time. George was described as tall, with shoulder length black hair, the skin tone of his Scottish father, and the facial features of his mother.



14 George Colbert

Largely illiterate, George was nevertheless a wealthy and influential figure. He was an instrumental in raising 350 Chickasaw warriors who fought alongside General Jackson in the Creek War of 1813-14 and again in New Orleans in 1815. He would play a prominent role in the siting of the Natchez Trace, and, with government support, he won a ferry license and operated the Natchez Trace crossing from 1801 to 1819. In 1815, the U. S. government received from Colbert an invoice for \$75,000 for feeding, lodging and transporting General Jackson's troops to and from the general's triumph over the British in New Orleans. He became a wealthy planter and slaveholder and moved 150 slaves with his family to Oklahoma in 1837. While he and his brothers were never "real" chieftains of the tribe, their familiarity with the English language and their ease in dealing with U. S. officials, led to their designation as principal chiefs in dealings with

¹⁵¹ Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 21-22.; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 23.

¹⁵² Durham, W. T. *Before Tennessee 1790-1796: A Narrative History of the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio*. Piney Flats TN: Rocky Mount Historical Association, 1990, p. 236.

government.¹⁵³ Over the next decades, George Colbert would be instrumental in writing the final chapter of the native tribes in the Tennessee Valley.

The courting of the Chickasaw required patience by U.S. agents and officials. At a conference in Nashville in 1792, the Chickasaw protested so vehemently about a pending trading post permitted by the [1786 Treaty \(Hopewell\)](#), that William Blount promised to abandon plans for its construction.¹⁵⁴ The death of Alexander McGillivray shortly thereafter, February 17, 1793, introduced an additional element of unrest in the Valley. Despite his insistence on maintaining the integrity of the joint tribal hunting grounds, he had engaged in a crafty diplomacy with the Americans. Unlike members of the Upper Creek tribes who would align with the Chickamauga Cherokee, he was viewed by most as a force for stability.

Rising Tensions. Indeed, 1793 was a watershed year. Importantly, the death of Alexander McGillivray, the deft statesman, would usher in a period of increased tribal restiveness without leadership—whose ultimate consequence would be Andrew Jackson’s final victory at Horseshoe Bend. In the same year, the U. S. government—to blunt continued Spanish intrigue in the region—decided to establish protected trading posts among the Indian tribes. By 1796 there were garrisoned posts along the Alabama-Tombigbee and the Mississippi basins. These would become centers of influence and conflict as the pressures of settler migration pushed tribal patience to its limits. And finally, in that year, the American inventor, Eli Whitney, brought his cotton gin into the marketplace. In doing so, Whitney made upland short staple cotton into a highly profitable crop., setting the stage for large scale plantation agriculture and leading to tumultuous changes in the region.

¹⁵³ [Colbert, George](#). *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*. Online. Accessed September 1, 2011, Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History. A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999](#); William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 136; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 26.; Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 21.

¹⁵⁴ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 20.

The three factors together—restiveness in the aftermath of McGillivray's death, the spread of garrisoned trading posts down the river courses, and the introduction the cotton gin—had far-reaching impact. The demand for arable land, already at floodtide, placed the remaining Indian lands in peril; from their garrisoned outposts, government agents could barter for those lands, and the need for labor in the cotton fields of the near future would lead to a marked increase in slavery in the area.¹⁵⁵ Growing settlements of Americans were reported in the Tensas basin (the confluence of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers) by the end of the century. While some settler continued to reach Alabama via the Mississippi and the overland route from Natchez, the vast majority now came down the Tennessee River or via horse path to the Alabama River. A few still made their way upriver, arriving first at Mobile Bay, and then by boat upriver all the way to Tuscaloosa, and from there overland to Huntsville, Florence, or other destinations.¹⁵⁶

With the Chickasaw reasonably quiescent, and with progress being made against Indian resistance in the Northwest Territory, the irrepressible James Robertson was able in 1794 to persuade territorial governor Blount to agree to a secret plan to attack the stronghold of the Chickamauga Cherokee on the upper reaches of the Tennessee. Robertson had intelligence from both the Chickasaw and contacts in West Florida that a Creek/Cherokee action against settlers in the region was being planned. The surprise attack would represent a reprise of his pre-emptive destruction of Oka Kapassa in 1787. From Kentucky, where fear of Indian attacks was also resident, 150 riflemen were led south by [Col. William Whitley](#). [Col. John Montgomery](#) raised a rifle company from the Clarksville area, and another company was recruited another from Nashville. The volunteers trekked to an assembly point four miles outside of Nashville where additional 70 men dispatched by Governor Blount were waiting. Altogether, Robertson had at his disposal approximately 550 armed and mounted riflemen.¹⁵⁷ His charge to Major James Orr, whom he placed in

¹⁵⁵ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, pp. 20, "[Eli Whitney](#)". *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed September 1, 2011; "[Eli Whitney's Patent for the Cotton Gin](#)". *The National Archives*. Online. Accessed February 15, 2026

¹⁵⁶ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, pp. 67, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Willoughby, Earl. "[Spanish Intrigue and the Nickajack Campaign](#)." *State Gazette*, April 2, 2002. Online. Accessed February 15, 2026.

command, was “...to defend Mero District against a large body of Creeks and Cherokees of the Lower Towns, which I have information is about to invade it; also, to punish in any exemplary manner such Indians as have recently committed depredations in this District.”¹⁵⁸

Young [Joseph Brown](#), the survivor of a massacre of flatboat travelers in the vicinity of Nickajack some years before led the mounted riflemen to a trail previously unknown to them over the Cumberland mountains to their destination on the Tennessee at the mouth of the Sequatchie River.¹⁵⁹

As Robertson had done at Oka Kapassa, Orr attacked the Nickajack redoubt on the south bank by swimming half of his force across the river in the dark of night. Slipping into the village, the riflemen killed 70 of the warriors bivouacked there, along with many women and children. The chief, Breath, was among those killed. The village was razed by fire as was the neighboring village of Running Water. The secret campaign was waged in ten days from beginning to end, and Orr’s militia suffered but a single casualty. Around 1800, Major Orr would return to the Nickajack vicinity and, with the aid of Cherokee involved in the battle half dozen years before, operate a grist mill and a tavern as well as manufacture gunpowder from the saltpeter in Nickajack’s caves.¹⁶⁰ On the return to Nashville, the contingent was met enroute by Chickasaw forces who informed them of Wayne’s successes in the Northwest.¹⁶¹

The [Treaty of the Tellico Blockhouse](#), July 2, 1794, ended the conflict between the Chickamauga Cherokee and the settlers of the Cumberland.

¹⁵⁸ Pat Alderman, et. al. [The Overmountain Men: Battle of King’s Mountain, Cumberland decade, State of Franklin, Southwest Territory](#). Johnson City TN: Overmountain Press, 1986. Originally published 1970, p. 275. It is worth noting that the district derived its name from the Spanish governor of Louisiana, Esteban Rodrigues Miro, who had served with Spain in abetting the American cause during the revolutionary war. The superior court district of North Carolina was named in his honor in 1788 at the instigation of James Robertson eager to keep alive an alliance with Spain as a means to halt the depredations of the Creeks and Cherokee and to open the river courses under Spanish control to the Cumberland pioneers. Miro’s name was inadvertently misspelled.

¹⁵⁹ Vicki Rozema. [Footsteps of the Cherokees: A guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation](#). Winston-Salem NC: John F. Blair, 2007, p. 79.

¹⁶⁰ Vicki Rozema. [Footsteps of the Cherokees: A guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation](#). Winston-Salem NC: John F. Blair, 2007, p. 79.

¹⁶¹ Pat Alderman, et. al. [The Overmountain Men: Battle of King’s Mountain, Cumberland decade, State of Franklin, Southwest Territory](#). Johnson City TN: Overmountain Press, 1986. Originally published 1970, p. 275.

The United States was doing what it could to control the situation in the region. In the same year, Double Head was among the delegation of more militant Cherokee chieftains who were invited to the seat of government in Philadelphia, where they were greeted with pomp and circumstance by Secretary of War [Henry Knox](#) and treated to an audience with President Washington. The Americans promised to make good on compensation agreed to in the earlier [Treaty of Hopewell](#) (1785) and to increase the annual annuity to the Cherokee. According to some, Double Head himself was given \$5,000 which was never further distributed as planned.¹⁶² From this point forward, the heretofore antagonist Double Head became an active assimilationist and collaborator with the United States. From his village on Bluewater Creek, he established his own plantation and leased land to white farmers. With the aid of his white financial advisor [John Chisholm](#), he created the Doublehead Company for the purpose of land speculation.¹⁶³

In 1796, the U. S. solidified its control in the region, creating the [state of Tennessee](#) from the Southwest Territory. In the same year, [Benjamin Hawkins](#) became Principal Temporary Agent for the Southern Indians. In June 1797, he removed Robertson from his post with the Chickasaw.¹⁶⁴

The United States was also working to formalize its border with Spain to the South. When Britain took West Florida from Spain at the close of the French and Indian war, the boundary of the domain was the 31° parallel. Subsequently extended to 32° 28' during British administration, Spain insisted on maintaining that boundary when the Floridas were returned at the end of the Revolutionary War, even as the [Treaty of Paris](#) (1783) recognized American sovereignty extending to the 31° parallel. The U. S. insistence on that arrangement finally prevailed when the lower boundary was restored by **Treaty of San Lorenzo**, or [Pickney's Treaty](#) in 1795. Below the parallel, Mobile remained in Spanish hands.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, the

¹⁶² Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 17.

¹⁶³ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999. Online. Accessed February 15, 2026

¹⁶⁴ R, S. Cotterill. "[Federal Indian Management in the South 1789-1825](#)." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 20, no. 3 (December 1933), p. 336.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 1; Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study](#).

United States was guaranteed navigation rights on the Mississippi River, though by error, the Spanish were able to maintain a tariff barrier above Mobile, restricting the flow of goods. With the treaty, the [Mississippi Territory](#), the extension of U. S. authority below the new state of Tennessee would soon be created. The old settlement of St. Stephens on the Tombigbee was ceded to the United States under terms of the treaty. By 1797, Spain had evacuated the disputed territory that stretched from the Mississippi to the Chattahoochee. In 1798, the [Mississippi territorial government](#) was created. Fundamental transformation loomed for the Tennessee Valley and the Muscle Shoals region.¹⁶⁶

[*largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821.*](#) Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 294; Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [*The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819.*](#) Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1961, p. 446.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [*The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828.*](#) Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p.9.

Chapter 1

Alabama: From Mississippi Territory to Statehood

The Mississippi Territory

The Mississippi Territory was created April 7, 1798, by Congress. It was carved from the land ceded by Spain in the [Treaty of San Lorenzo](#) (1795).



15 Mississippi Territory Map

The original boundaries of the territory included land that would become the states of Mississippi (1817) and Alabama (1819). The indigenous tribes were joined in their restiveness regarding the new entity by the state of

Georgia, which did not relinquish its claims to the territorial lands until 1802.¹⁶⁷

The U.S. presence in the Southeast was becoming increasingly strong, and the future of the native tribes in their historic homeland increasingly tenuous. After 1783, Great Britain no longer had a Gulf Coast presence, ceding East and West Florida to Spain in the Treaty of Paris. Spain would hold onto most of its land below the 31st parallel until the War of 1812. From Pensacola, Spain maintained a significant garrison and trading center, the base for its interactions with the indigenous tribes. Spain also continued a presence in Mobile, maintaining the tariff barrier on the Mobile River restricting American trade. In 1802 a [federal-state commission](#) finally negotiated a settlement growing out of the Yazoo land fraud, and Georgia's assertion of the right to sell 40 million acres of land rights it claimed in the Mississippi Territory to speculators.¹⁶⁸ Georgia kept a little territory in what is now the western portion of that state, and the settlement established the boundary line between Georgia and the Mississippi Territory -- and the future states of Alabama and Mississippi.¹⁶⁹ The new territory initially established its capital at Natchez; John Adams appointed [Winthrop Sargent](#) as governor. Alabama interests were distant from the new capital and not well represented in the new government.¹⁷⁰

With the 1802 settlement, *a fundamental change in U.S. Indian policy also occurred*. In settling its disagreements with the state of Georgia, President Jefferson agreed to the purchase of tribal lands and relocation of those still living within its border as soon as possible. The removal of the Creeks, Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw became an inevitability.¹⁷¹

American Indian policy before Jefferson was aimed primarily at extending U. S. influence among the tribes and blunting the influence of Spain. The presence of agents, the introduction of trading posts, and manned forts certainly succeeded in tamping down violence and extending

¹⁶⁷ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44

¹⁶⁸ "[The Compact of 1802](#)." Sage. Online. Accessed February 16, 2026

¹⁶⁹ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 39. Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 3

¹⁷⁰ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama press, 1994, p.44.

¹⁷¹ Claudio Saunt. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, p 34, 55.

the power of the federal government. Treaties during that time targeted land cessions and trading path rights. With the election of Thomas Jefferson policies would change. From an intent to essentially assimilate the tribes in place, Jefferson evolved the policy of removal of the tribes further west and opening the southern lands to settlers. He did not propose a forced military removal, but a peaceful one, built upon acculturation, trade, and the accumulation of debts that the tribes would satisfy through the sale or cession of lands. Nowhere would that policy change become more apparent than in the Tennessee Valley.¹⁷²

The creation of the Mississippi Territory was another step in the diminution of Spanish power and prestige in the region. In 1789, the Spanish governor of Mobile had established a fort and outpost at [St. Stephens](#), on the fall line of the Tombigbee River, some 70 miles above



[16](#) Spanish Southwest, including St. Stephens

Mobile. Within a few years, St. Stephens had attracted a sturdy population, largely of American settlers who made their way overland through the Creek lands from Georgia. By the time the Mississippi Territory was established, as many as 200 white settlers and perhaps 100 slaves lived there. The Americans were eager to take advantage of Spain's land grants in return for loyalty oaths to the crown. After the Treaty of San Lorenzo (1795), the Spanish governor remained confident St. Stephens was below the 31st parallel.

¹⁷² DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 19.

But that was not the case. St. Stephens was in American territory. The city was surrendered to U. S. troops under the command of [Lt. John McClary](#). Moving south, to add a measure of protection from both the tribes and the Spanish, the military constructed [Fort Stoddert](#), hard against the 31st parallel, even closer to Mobile.¹⁷³ Fort Stoddert eventually would become the western terminus of the [Federal Road](#) through Alabama and Georgia. St. Stephens would flourish for many years as a thriving village and after 1803 as the location of a U.S. factory for the local tribes.¹⁷⁴

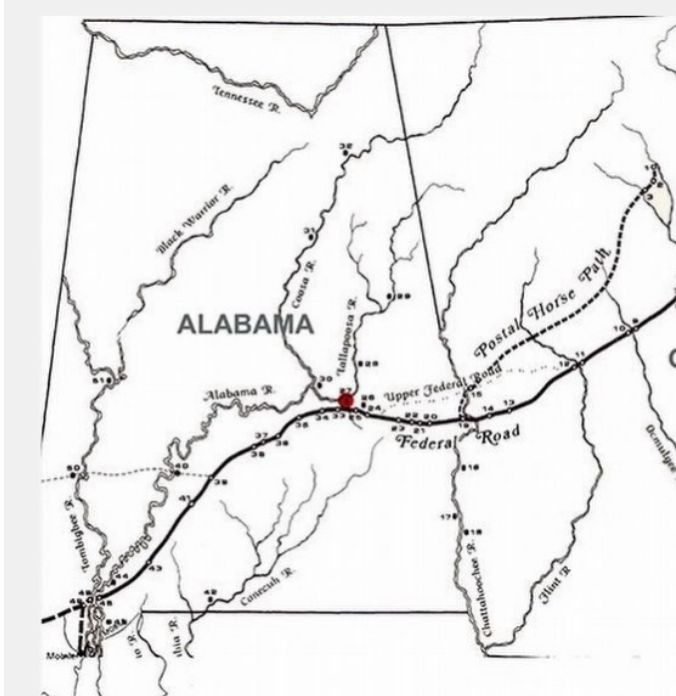
In those first years of settlement in the Mississippi Territory the privations of the frontier were very real. Everywhere the challenge of carving sites out of primeval forest for crude family cabins was a compelling chore. Sometimes small planters coerced a few enslaved Africans to assist with the initial construction; sometimes community efforts would clear a cabin a day, each of the rudest sort. Next came the clearing of fields and splitting rails for stockades. The frontier was without roads; there were no merchants providing goods, no post offices, and no mail. Crude improvisations meant that corn raised from seed was dried, and then ground in a small hand mill, or pounded in a stone or tree stump. The frontier settlers picked their own cotton, wove their own cloth, tanned their own skins, and learned the most rudimentary of ironworking skills. Gradually merchants would erect a mill, a forge, or a store, freeing the family from some chores and allowing each to direct more time to working the land. It was not unusual initially to travel ten miles or more to find a grist mill or a cobbler.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44., Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 343

¹⁷⁴ “[St. Stephens, Alabama](#),” *Wikipedia*, July 29, 2024; Peter J. Hamilton. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p. 340; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.41.

¹⁷⁵ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1951, p. 134.

In 1800, Governor Sargent carved [Washington County](#) from the territory to facilitate local government for the area. The huge county spanned the land cessions from the Chattahoochee River to the Pearl River in present day Mississippi. From that vast expanse, 29 Alabama counties and 16 in the state of Mississippi later would be formed.¹⁷⁶



17 Federal Road

In 1803, with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon (who had recently pressured its return from Spain), President Jefferson directed that a [Federal Road](#) be constructed across Creek lands from St. Stephens to Athens, Georgia, a route that became a reality with the cession of land and right of way by the Creeks in 1805.¹⁷⁷ In the same year, the [Treaty of Hoe Buckintoopa](#) signed with the Choctaw ceded to the United States more than

850,000 acres above Mobile.¹⁷⁸ In 1805, to settle debts with the private trading firm of Pantan, Leslie and Company, the United States brokered a settlement in return for the cession of more than four million acres in what is now south central Mississippi.¹⁷⁹ Within five years, settlers were flooding the route to the Tombigbee settlements.

The Spanish presence crumbled steadily. A small portion of Spanish West Florida remained after the French retook control of Louisiana and that

¹⁷⁶ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 40.

¹⁷⁷ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 43.

¹⁷⁸ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 22.

¹⁷⁹ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 24.

area was not included in Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase. Rebellious settlers in that Pearl River region, American and those still harboring Tory allegiances, rebelled against the weak Spanish government and declared an independent republic in 1810. The putative republic was quickly annexed, by the United States. The U.S. flag was raised over Baton Rouge and the area annexed into the Territory of Orleans, becoming the state of Louisiana in 1812.¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, the small Spanish garrison protecting Mobile fell to the U.S. navy in 1813, becoming the only territorial gain made by the U.S. in its declared war against Great Britain. The fate of Spanish West Florida was now certain, although not until 1821 and the ratification of the [Adams-Onis Treaty](#) did Spain cede all of East and West Florida to the United States.¹⁸¹ In the events of Fort Mims and the Creek War, the Spanish would still play a role.

The Ascendancy of the United States in the Southeast

In this manner, the near-term fate of both the Spanish and the indigenous tribes was sealed. By 1815, the U. S. population had reached 8.5 million people, and the white birth rate stood at seven children per woman. The westward press toward open, virtually unoccupied land was irrepressible.¹⁸² Through fortifications and settlements, the U.S. began to actively promote settlement, negotiating treaties for safe travel through tribal lands and beginning to acquire further native land.¹⁸³ The establishment of the Mississippi Territory, greater travel safety through treaties and fortifications, the availability of cheap land suitable for cotton and the technological innovation of the cotton gin opened the floodgates in the region. Settler came from the washed-out tobacco lands of Virginia and the Carolinas. Population steadily increased from 1798 to the onset of the War

¹⁸⁰ Davis, William C. "[History of the Short-lived Independent Republic of Florida](#)," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2013. Online access; Higgs, Robert. "[Not Merely Perfidious But Ungrateful: The U. S. Takeover of West Florida](#)," *The Independent Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 306.

¹⁸¹ Higgs, Robert. "[Not Merely Perfidious But Ungrateful: The U. S. Takeover of West Florida](#)," *The Independent Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 2005), p.308; Cox, Isaac Joslin. [The West Florida Controversy: 1798 -1818](#). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1918.

Smith, Gene Allen. "'Our Flag Was Displayed Within Their Works. The Treaty of Ghent and the Conquest of Mobile.'" *Alabama Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 3 -21.

¹⁸² David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 33-34.

¹⁸³ R. S. Cotterill. [The Beginnings of Railroads in the Southwest](#). *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, VIII, 4, p. 318-326.

of 1812 and would mushroom at its conclusion, growing from around 9,000 to more than 220,000 during that period.¹⁸⁴

The Territory had few non-indigenous settlements prior to the conclusion of the War of 1812. Natchez, initially laid out by the Spanish in the 1790s, was the largest city between New Orleans and the Ohio Valley. Commercially, culturally, and politically, Natchez was the most important urban area in the Mississippi Territory. The other little sliver of population could be found above the 31st parallel along the Alabama-Tombigbee and Tensas Rivers. About 25 miles below St. Stephens, just above Mobile, the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers are connected by a stream known as “the cut-off.” Below that connection, the two rivers assume the names Tensaw and Mobile Rivers respectively. The land in the area came to be known as “[Tensaw](#)”. Its small population dated to Spanish and British treaties with the Choctaw and Creeks and included among its inhabitants on farmsteads and small communities Tories who had fled the East during the Revolution.¹⁸⁵

Along the Tennessee Valley, squatters were plowing the indigenous tribal lands as early as 1787. With settlers streaming overland from the Cumberland or downriver via the increasingly pacified Tennessee, it filled up more quickly than other regions and became the largest settlement in that part of the Territory.¹⁸⁶

The Creeks and Cherokee especially bridled at the growing population pressures and land hunger of the Georgians and the settlers in the Huntsville and Tombigbee regions. As the geopolitical scene evolved toward renewed confrontation between the United States and Great Britain, the latter was quick to attempt to exploit native tensions to its benefit. As conflict neared, Congress in 1811 authorized the widening of the Federal Road through Creek territory to 16 feet, the better to accommodate the movement of military wagons and equipment.¹⁸⁷ As

¹⁸⁴ Thomas P Abernethy. [The South in the New Nation](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976, p. 455. “[Mississippi Territory](#)”, *Wikipedia*, September 15, 2011. Last accessed online 8 August 2024.

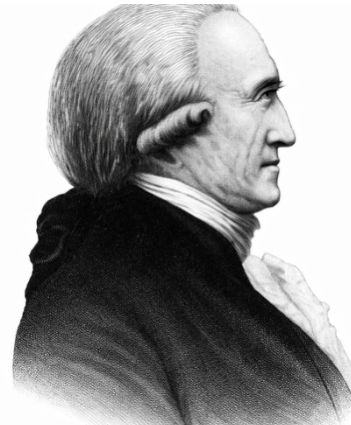
¹⁸⁵ Mike Bunn. Early Alabama: [An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913, p. 12. Google Books

¹⁸⁷ Hamilton, Peter J. [Early Roads of Alabama. Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society](#). V. II. Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898. Pp. 39-56.; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama

settlers poured through Creek lands enroute to Tombigbee, tensions with both the English and the Creeks festered.

From colonial times to that day, many Creeks had adopted the lifestyles of the settlers. [Benjamin Hawkins](#), federal agent to the Creeks 1796 -16, sought to change the native attitudes through a policy of “civilization” and acculturation. Efforts were made to empower tribal councils and inculcate among the Creeks an observance of U.S. laws as well as the concept of private property rights.¹⁸⁸ With a sizeable budget and several assistant agents, Hawkins became the lynchpin of a far-reaching acculturation effort in the Southeast.¹⁸⁹



18 Benjamin Hawkins Indian Agent

Some were open to the message. Native plantations with enslaved laborers were common; some initiated cotton cultivation. McGillivray himself had established two large slaveholds before his death – one deep in Creek country on the Coosa River, where 60 slaves toiled, and the other in the Tensaw region to be closer to the Spanish. Intermarriages between Creek, white, mixed race and black inhabitants of the region were common. Ed Bridges in his work describes a Creek world of increasing turmoil – socially and spiritually as well as economic.¹⁹⁰ In the tradition of McGillivray, the mixed race chieftains were prominent as interpreters, traders, and cultural mediators. Many *became* wealthy slaveholding planters, aligning with the “civilization” program promoted by U. S. agents among the tribes,

Press, 2016, p. 44; Hamilton, Peter J. [Colonial Mobile. An Historical Study, largely from Original Sources, of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin from the Discovery of Mobile Bay in 1519 until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821](#). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898, p.346; “[Federal Road in Alabama](#).” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed February 18, 2026

¹⁸⁸ Dupre, Daniel S. “The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.”, in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 77.

¹⁸⁹ Frank, Andrew K. “Native American Removal.” In Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, pp. 394-395.

¹⁹⁰ Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: The Making of an American State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 47; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.46.

who sought to assimilate the indigenous tribes through farming, education, and the introduction Christianity.¹⁹¹

The openness of the Lower Creeks and others to the western lifestyle made them targets for the more traditionalist Creeks who were mostly congregated in the upper region settlements. In the Tensaw, the diverse population prospered, grazing herds of cattle on the cane and grass year round, and trading honey, beeswax, nut oils, and medicinal herbs for whiskey and rum, gunpowder and shot, and salt. The goods went by packhorse to Georgia or by canoe to Mobile or Pensacola. The Upper Creeks, more isolated, resisted assimilation and drew their inspiration from the fiery [Tecumseh](#) and other prophets. They sought a return to traditional Creek ways and opposed such encroachments as the Federal Road and Tensaw plantations on their lands. Those roads and the irrepressible flow of traffic contributed a spark that led to the Fort Mims massacre and the Creek War of 1813.¹⁹²

Adding to the unease in the Tensaw region were former Tory loyalists who had made their way to the region during the Revolution and who still held loyalties to both the British and the Spanish government to the south. Spain still controlled Florida and parts of the Gulf Coast and provided a competing and destabilizing influence in the region.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 158; Dupre, Daniel S. "The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.", in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 67.

¹⁹² The terms "Upper Creek" and "Lower Creek" were probably first used by the Charleston traders, referring to divergences in the trading paths toward the regional *talwas*. Typically, the Lower Creeks on the Flint and Chattahoochee, from where many of the Creek slave traders hailed, were in closer contact with the colonists. While the Upper Creeks exchanged deerskins with the traders for arms and ammunitions, they remained in greater isolation. See Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 50; Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1961, p. 446; Dupre, Daniel S. "The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.", in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 68; Hudson, Angela Pulley. [Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010., pp. 131-132.

¹⁹³ Claudio Saunt. [A New Order of Things: Power, Property and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816](#). New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Halbert, H. S. and Ball, T. H. [The Creek War of 1813 and 1814](#). Montgomery: White, Woodruff and Fowler, 1895; Piker, Joshua. [Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

By 1812, foment among the Creeks, and external warmongering from the likes of the Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and others led to violent, sporadic, outbreaks, with [settlers being killed along Duck River](#) in Tennessee, travelers murdered on the Federal Road, and elsewhere.¹⁹⁴ In June, the United States [declared war](#) on Great Britain, with sweeping attacks planned against British Canadian strongholds. In May, the U.S. reoccupied Mobile, sequestering Spanish troops in their fortifications for a year until their removal.¹⁹⁵ Pensacola remained in Spanish hands.¹⁹⁶

Tecumseh's visit to the Creeks in 1811 and his call for native unity against American expansionism provoked a more militant stance among the "Red Stick" faction of Upper Creeks. His rhetoric, combined with religious revivalism, galvanized the faction, which threw in their lot with the British. In July 1813, the great majority of their Upper Creek villages affirmed their determination to extirpate heresy within the tribe. As one of the more moderate chieftains warned Benjamin Hawkins: "The declaration of the prophets is to destroy everything received from the Americans and all the chiefs and their adherents who are friendly to the customs and ways of the white people; to put to death every man who will not join them; and by those means, to unite the nation in aid of the British and the Indians of the Lakes against their white neighbors as soon as their friends the British will be ready of them."¹⁹⁷

Shortly thereafter, a war-minded contingent of Red Sticks, who favored the Spanish to the Americans, made their way to Pensacola to obtain arms and supplies with which to strike against the encroaching English-speaking presence. The weakened Spanish governor, [Gonzalez Manrique](#), had little weaponry to spare; from the trading firm of [John Forbes and Company](#), the militants obtained nothing at all. Returning from that city with limited powder and supplies, the Red Sticks were spotted and

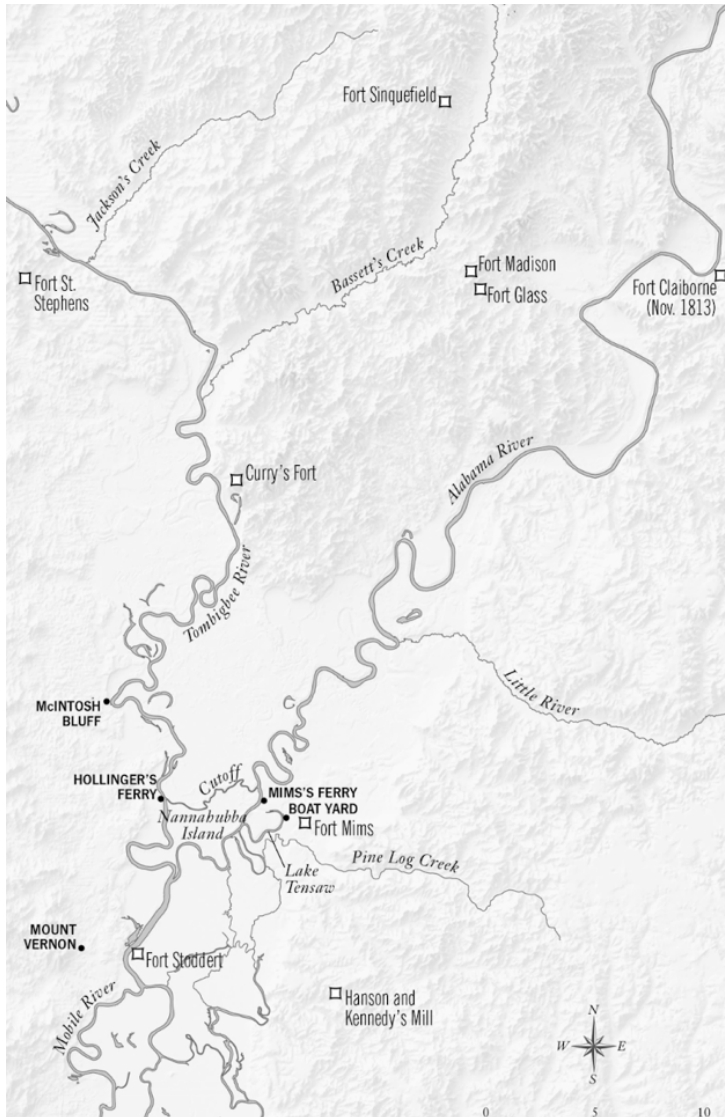
¹⁹⁴ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, pp.44-47. Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 91 – 127.

¹⁹⁵ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.48.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 15.

¹⁹⁷ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 149.

attacked by a settler militia force supported by sympathetic Tensaw Creeks near Burnt Corn in northern Baldwin County. The violent confrontation ended with two of the militia killed and no clear victor; but it further



19 Mims Ferry. 1813

antagonized the Creeks, who made their way back to Pensacola to attempt further resupply¹⁹⁸

The Fort Mims

Massacre. Settlers in the area, fearing the worst hastily began assembling fortifications for mutual support. Most farmsteads were abandoned. From Ft. Stoddert, Gen. Claiborne dispatched 150 soldiers under the command of Major Beasley to the area. The Beasley-led contingent found their way to one of the hurriedly palisaded fortifications constructed around the home of planter and trader Samuel Mims in Baldwin County.¹⁹⁹ Crowded within the palisade were 553 men, women and

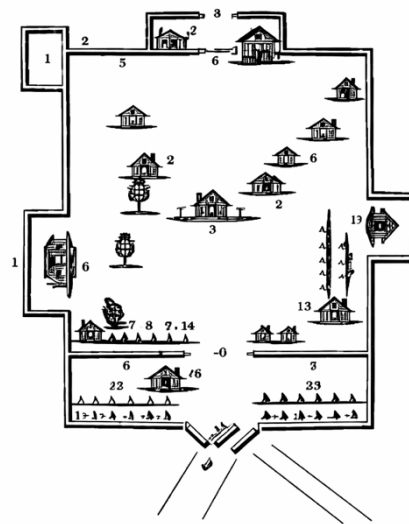
¹⁹⁸ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [*The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828*](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 15; Albert James Pickett. [*History of Alabama and incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*](#). V. 2. Charleston: Walker and James, 1851, pp. 250-260; Peter Cozzens. [*A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South*](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 163.

¹⁹⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 25; Halbert, H. S. and Ball, T. H. [*The Creek War of 1813 and 1814*](#). Montgomery: White, Woodruff and Fowler, 1895; Davis, Karl. "Remember Fort Mims: Reinterpreting the Origins of the Creek War." *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 22, NO. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 611-636.

children, soldiers, and slaves, including Creeks opposed to the hostilities. Its mixed population made it a prime target for Red Stick forces. On August 30, between 700 and 1000 Creek “Red Stick” warriors under the leadership of the conflicted Creek plantation owner [William Weatherford](#) (1781-1824) charged the fort entering through the unsecured gate and within hours brutally massacred most of those within. Only a few managed escapes to deliver the word of the slaughter.²⁰⁰ In testament to the to the complexity of the times, some slaves helped to assemble the Mims stockade, others sought shelter inside on that fateful day, and still others helped guide the Red Sticks to their destination.²⁰¹

As the raids continued, news of the massacre made its way through the region. The number of deaths, the slaughter of women and children, and the macabre mutilations were widely reported in the regional

DRAWING OF PORT MIMS,
From among Gen. Claiborne's manuscript papers.



REFERENCES:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Block House. | 13 Ensign Chambliss' Tent. |
| 2 Pickets cut away by the Indians. | 14 Ensign Gibbs. |
| 3 Guard's Station. | 16 Ramson. |
| 4 Guard House. | 17 Captain Middleton: |
| 5 Trivitory Gate, but not up. | 17 Captain Jack's Station. |
| 6 This Gate-wao shon, but a hole. | 18 Captain Jack's Soration. |
| 8 This Gate wao heen the Indians. | 19 Pot-holes takioy by Indians. |
| 7 (And you (har thon) 12 | 29 29 Pot-holes taken by Indians. |
| 9 Captains Bailey's Station. | 20 Major Beasley's Cabins. |
| 10 Steadham's House. | 21 Captain Jack's Company. |
| 11 Kitchen. | 22 Captain Middleton's Company. |
| 11 Mrs. Power's House. | 22 Where Major Beasley fell. |
| 12 Kitchen. | 23 Eastern Gate, where the In- |
| 13 Old Gate-way—open. | diens entered. |

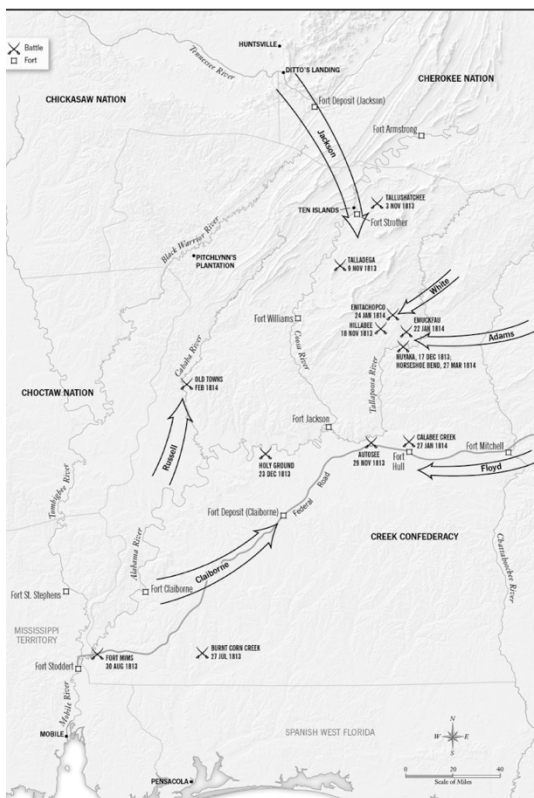
20 The Fort Mims Stockade, 1813

²⁰⁰ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 48-49; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.48-50; Pickett, Albert James. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period](#). Sheffield, Ala: Reprinted Robert C. Randolph, 1896 Weatherford himself may have left the scene before the bloodletting at Fort Mims.

²⁰¹ Dupre, Daniel S. “The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.” in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 72.

papers, provoking rage and a furor for revenge. In the neighboring states, militia units were assembled, armed and directed against the Creeks from every direction. The Tensaw region in 1813 was a volatile frontier, where cultural diversity, political ambition, and economic interests collided. The massacre at Fort Mims was a tragic flashpoint in the struggle for the control of the southeastern border. In the end, the results would be disastrous for the European coastal presence, for the Creek population and all other indigenous tribes that inhabited the region. The result would be the extirpation of the native tribes, the total dominion of an American cultural and economic presence, and the rise of a cotton kingdom who success hinged upon the brutal enslavement of millions of Africans.

Although not swift or coordinated, the American response the Fort Mims attack would be crushing. No less than seven columns of federal soldiers and state militias would be directed against the Red Sticks. [General](#)



21 Creek War Campaigns 1813-1814

[Ferdinand Claiborne](#) aided by the Choctaw, enemies of the Creeks, directed the Mississippi militia from the west. Claiborne located Weatherford at the Creek stronghold of Holy Ground and resoundingly defeated the warriors, Weatherford effecting a narrow escape.²⁰² [General John Floyd](#) led the Georgia militia into the fray from the east; [General John Cocke](#) converged from east Tennessee and General Andrew Jackson directed his forces from the western portion of that state. With largely volunteer forces making their way through the rugged wilderness, progress was determined but slow. Until Andrew Jackson found the Creeks gathered at Horseshoe Bend.²⁰³

²⁰² Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: The Making of an American State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 48-49; DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 28.

²⁰³ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.52; Thomas

In a bend of the Tallapoosa River, known by the Americans as Horseshoe Bend, some 1000 of the warring Creeks were gathered under the headship of Chief Menowa., the river protecting their rear and sides and a stout barricade barring entry on the front. The fortification stood about 12 miles from present-day Alexander City and across the bend from the Creek village of Neuyorcau, so named after the 1790 Treaty of New York that had promised a better shared future between the American settlers and the Creeks.²⁰⁴



22 Creek Encampment and Barricade at Horseshoe Bend

With Floyd at Ft. Mitchell and Claiborne on the Alabama, the war was left to Jackson and the Tennessee troops and his Choctaw and Cherokee warriors. One of Bishop Robert Paine's earliest memories of his family's move to Tennessee in 1814, was their encounter with those forces. Within a few miles of reaching their new home, the family procession was halted by the militia forces, and informed that his father, the head of the family was to be drafted into Jackson's army of volunteers. After some hesitation and consultation, it was agreed that Paine's uncle Robert Williams, his mother's brother, was accepted as a substitute. He succumbed

to illness and Robert had to be dispatched into the wilderness to bring him home. Within a year, his uncle would die from the privations he endured in the Creek Wars²⁰⁵

In addition to the tested militia, the total force at Jackson's command at Horseshoe Bend numbered 3,300, including the Creek,

Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 16.

²⁰⁴ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, pp. 27-28; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 48-49

²⁰⁵ Robert Paine. *Notes of Life*. Typescript. Available on Microfilm as part of the *Nashville Christian Advocate* collection, Vanderbilt University School of Theology, pp. 7-9, 13; W. L. McDonald, [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 4.

Chickasaw and Cherokee warriors. Among the number were Lower Creeks led by William McIntosh, opposed to the Red Sticks, a band of some 500 Cherokee directed by Chief Junaluska and a contingent of Chickasaw led by William Colbert of Bear Creek. John Ross rode among the Cherokee.²⁰⁶

Seven months after the Fort Mims massacre, on March 27, 1814, Jackson's force struck the Red Sticks from front and rear. While infantry troops with bayonets forced the barricade, General John Coffee led militia and tribesmen across the river. The bitter day of fighting resulted in the virtual annihilation of the Creek forces, although the badly wounded Red Stick leader Menowa managed a narrow escape, remaining a Creek leader in the years afterwards. From those killed fighting and those gunned down or drowned in the Tallapoosa, Jackson estimated no more than 20 Creeks survived. Militia wrote home that the Tallapoosa River ran red with Creek blood.²⁰⁷

The few survivors and other broken contingents of Creek warriors were earnestly summoned to the tenuous British foothold in Pensacola, to assist in the planned assault on New Orleans. It was not to be. Jackson defeated the British and Creeks at Mobile Point and drove them from Pensacola. Mopping up, [Major Uriah Blue](#) led a contingent of Jackson's militia into the swamplands surrounding Pensacola in pursuit of the remaining fleeing Creeks. The resounding defeat of the tattered remnants of the Creek force effectively ended the Creek War of 1813-1814.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, pp. 27-28; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 51-53; Harry E. Wallace. "[History of the Shoals](#)". Lauderdale County Alabama: History. A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily* February 25, 1999-; Amalia K. Amaki and Amelia Boyton Robinson. *Images of America: Tuskegee*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013, p. 10.

²⁰⁷ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 51-53; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.p. 52-53; Halbert, H. S. and Ball, T. H. [The Creek War of 1813 and 1814](#). Montgomery: White, Woodruff and Fowler, 1895; Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 176 – 388.

²⁰⁸ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, pp. 27-28. In 1814, Pensacola was part of **Spanish Florida** (held by Spain), but it was occupied and used as a base by British forces prior to the attack on New Orleans. In August 1814, British forces entered the bay with the consent of the Spanish governor to launch operations against the U.S.,

Treaty of Fort Jackson. After the triumph at Horseshoe Bend, General Jackson moved his victorious troops to the abandoned grounds of Fort Toulouse, initially established by the French a hundred years previously. There he constructed the palisade, “[Fort Jackson](#)” to which he summoned in August 1814 the vanquished Creeks to submit to his terms. Those terms were virtually unconditional: more than half of all remaining Creek lands – 23 million acres -- were ceded to the United States. The abbreviated Creek lands that remained lay astraddle an area inside the Mississippi Territory and Georgia²⁰⁹ Hostilities abated, Fort Jackson evolved into a stopping place on the Federal Road for travelers. Because it was a rather safe place, settlers tended to stay in the region and Montgomery County grew rather fast.²¹⁰

The hagiography of Horseshoe Bend overshadowed what the battle portended for the native peoples of the Southeast. The battles in the eastern Creek territory created heroes for generations of American schoolboys. Andrew Jackson’s resounding victory was his introduction to the American mind.²¹¹ His equally stunning rout to follow in New Orleans, January 1815, would pave his path the presidency. General Coffee would have an Alabama county in Lower Creek country bear his name. Among the militiamen on hand to witness the victories were [Davy Crockett](#) and [Sam Houston](#)—the latter taking a couple of bullets as well an arrow in the thigh at Horseshoe Bend. The future capital of the state of Alabama would bear the name of the first militiaman killed on the barricade with a musket ball to the brain, [Major Lemuel Montgomery](#). Even Red Stick chieftain William Weatherford, who would survive the hostilities, was forgiven by Jackson and

prompting General Andrew Jackson to seize the city on November 7, 1814, to prevent it from being used further

²⁰⁹ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 53-54; David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 75.

²¹⁰ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 17; Peter J. Hamilton and Thomas M. Owen. [“Topographical Notes and Observations on the Alabama River, August 1814”, By Major Howell Tatum](#). *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. Vol. II. Alabama Historical Society, 1898, p. 202.

²¹¹ David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 13.

subsequently romanticized as [Red Eagle](#) in the popular poem by Alabama writer [Alexander Beaufort Meek](#) (1814-1865).²¹²

Wilderness Alabama

The war years hit the Mississippi Territory thunderously, raising fears, dampening migration, and reducing the purchase of land. In 1812, a time of relatively quietude, 144,000 acres were purchased for almost \$300,000 (\$2.08 per acre). The next year of the Creek War reduced sales to some 30,000 acres, returning \$60,000 to the treasury.

When the defeat of the Creeks again opened the roadways to migration, wealthy plantation owners seeking virgin, productive soil, and the seacoast's poor, seeking their own new start on cheap land, poured into the territory. Population pressures outstripped lines of supply. Frontier conditions in the Mississippi Territory were harsh. There were no amenities. In the Huntsville region, immigrants seeking food found that a single bushel of corn could cost four dollars, or the same price as two acres of land.²¹³ The roads were harsh, often impassible with flooding and deep mud. Long past the days of tribal warfare, travel remained arduous. One traveler in 1831 would declare the Federal Road to still be 'the very worst I have ever traveled.' Another making his way from the played-out lands of Virginia to the rich lands in Tuscaloosa reported breakdowns and privations enroute sufficient to make him wish 'he'd not been born.'²¹⁴ Traveling from Nashville to the families new home in Giles County, Tennessee, Robert Paine described much of the entire route as a vast cane break, "Indeed, the road was so narrow, and the cane so high, that they often met over the carriages, and formed an evergreen arch. It was a wonder to us. Bears, wolves and deer roamed the forests at will and the huntsman, his gun, and his dogs, were in their glory."²¹⁵

²¹²; Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. 51-53; for the poem, see A. B. Meek. *The Red Eagle: A Poem of the South*. Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1914. (The poem was first published 70 years prior).

²¹³ ; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 57.

²¹⁴ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, pp. 55 – 57.

²¹⁵ Robert Paine. *Notes of Life*. Typescript. Available on Microfilm as part of the *Nashville Christian Advocate* collection, Vanderbilt University School of Theology, p. 8.

But come they did, by water and by land, down the Federal Road through lower Alabama and along the Huntsville-Tuscaloosa Road through the hill country.²¹⁶ Men, women and children traveled by foot, by heavily



23 Rolling Hogshead

laden packhorse, ox-drawn carts and even with rolling hogsheads, artifices of [tobacco farming](#), stuffed with all the family's belongings and rolled for hundreds of miles. The odd innovation involved a shaft inserted through both sides of the barrels, harnesses attached and pulled along by oxen, horses, or carts. Families traveled

together as communities; the wealthy brought the enslaved in chains. The majority of the travelers arrived in the new territory with few possessions and meager food. They joined the traders and trappers who had braved the wilderness before them, along with Tories who had earlier fled the eastern seacoast for British West Florida, as well as pirates, criminals and thieves fleeing from justice in more civilized regions.²¹⁷ The new migrants brought with them memory of and need for their culture and institutions, of education, schools and churches. It was, said Stephen Weeks, "a new Völkerwanderung of English-speaking peoples."²¹⁸ Living near the eastern terminus of the Federal Road as a boy, Austin Harris Hansell later recollected he saw daily fifteen to twenty carts, each drawn by a single horse, the family riding within, and a spinning wheel attached to the rear, with the family dogs and livestock trailing in the van.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 55.

²¹⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893. Available online Google Books, p. 36; P. J. Hamilton. "[Early Roads of Alabama](#)". *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898.

²¹⁸ Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913. Google Books, p. 14.

²¹⁹ Daniel S. Dupre. [Alabama's Frontiers and the Rise of the Old South. A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier](#). Malcolm Rohrbough and Walter Nugent, editors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 188, 252.

The lands wrested from the Creeks by the Fort Jackson cession, perfect for growing [short staple cotton](#), were initially hundreds of miles beyond the scrutiny of territorial government, yet unsurveyed, and far from ready for public sale. Even after Territorial governor [David Holmes](#) created Monroe County from the cession in June 1815, the federal government was slow to authorize the sale of any public lands. Conflicting claims of the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee over many of those former Creek lands were finally negotiated away by 1816. Small tracts were retained by the Choctaw and Chickasaw in the south and northwestern parts of what would become the Alabama Territory, with the Creeks and Cherokee continuing to occupy more land in the north and east.²²⁰

Where possible, settlers – presumptive buyers in the role of squatters -- in advance of public land sale would visit an area and scout for the most arable potential purchase, plant a small crop to sustain the family upon return, and then make the way home to bring to the new site all they could. Williamson Hawkins' settlement in Jones Valley in present day Jefferson County, serves the illustrative purpose. A soldier with the Tennessee Volunteers during the Creek Wars, in the Spring of 1815, he made his way to the valley with what he could transport on his pack horse, driving cattle before him. He cleared the land and planted what crops he could. Leaving a slave to oversee the crude clearing, he returned to Tennessee to move family and more slaves to the home. The second trip was by wagon stuffed with household goods, bedding, and clothing. Farmyard animals followed tethered to the wagon, with chickens jostling in cages on the wagon's sides.²²¹

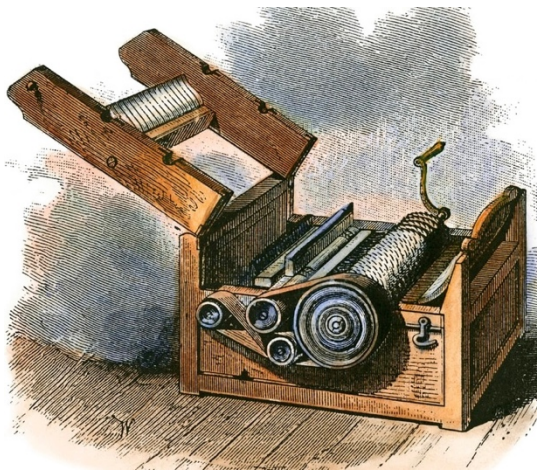
Robert Paine, the future Methodist Bishop, and first president of La Grange College followed a similar path on purchased land. In May 1814, his father moved the family from Granville County North Carolina, where he was Clerk of Court and farmer to Tennessee. He had scouted the Giles County land in 1807, and in the Fall of 1813, sent his slaves under the charge of his wife's brother to clear titled land, erect an abode, and plant a crop for the next Spring. "Thus, it was," he wrote, "when the whole family

²²⁰ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 95.

²²¹ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 58.

got there in the ensuing Spring, a fine crop was growing, and a comfortable house and home awaited us.”²²²

The vanquishment of the indigenous tribes and the advent of the Industrial Revolution resulted in a rush to the rich farmlands of the Tennessee Valley and the Alabama-Tombigbee basin. The cotton gin perfected by craftsmen like Eli Whitney increased the productivity of the



24 Eli Whitney Cotton Gin c. 1794

textile industry a *thousand-fold* declared the U.S. Census Office in 1810.

The gin answered the need for vast amounts of cotton fiber required for the new machines that could rapidly spin the fiber into thread and the new mechanically powered looms that wove the thread into inexpensive cloth for the world.

With cotton prices soaring in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the 1815 defeat of Napoleon, [Alabama Fever](#) gripped the young United States. In 1817, one of the settlers in the Huntsville area of the Alabama Territory wrote:

*The farmers here during 3 or 4 years acquired immense estates by raising cotton. Three or four years ago lands could be purchased for \$4 or \$5 an acre that are now selling for \$25 and \$30. The town is full of gentlemen from Virginia, Kentucky and the Carolinas who like ourselves have been exploring the country.... It is an elegant cotton country.*²²³

Between 1810 and 1820, the population of Alabama increased from 9,046 to 127,901²²⁴ Within that number, the enslaved population increased from a

²²² Robert Paine. *Notes of Life*. Typescript. Available on Microfilm as part of the *Nashville Christian Advocate* collection, Vanderbilt University School of Theology, p. 7.

²²³ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 58'; Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922

²²⁴ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 60.

little more than 2,600 to forty thousand.²²⁵ In contrast, Mississippi, which became a state in 1817, and had in 1810 boasted three times the population of that in the eastern half of the Territory showed a population of 75,000 in 1820.²²⁶ The socioeconomics of the new Alabama Territory were complex, mixed. For every slave owner, there were three who never owned slaves. There were geographical divisions as well. While the Tensaw and Tennessee-Tombigbee settlements were the first carved out of the space, the easier access from the populous neighboring states into the fertile Tennessee Valley soon led to a much greater population there. The rudiments of civilization were entirely missing in those early years. Visiting Tuscaloosa in 1821, William Ely found a rudimentary village of 800 squatters, still awaiting land sale there. “What they call their houses are either the most despicable rough dirty and uncomfortable rotting log cabins, or less durable and more mean buildings, most of them without a single pane of glass ... and almost as destitute of furniture. ... Some have no floor but the bare earth.”²²⁷

The farmers on the eastern side of the territory floated their goods, especially cotton, down the Coosa and Alabama rivers to Mobile for export. With the old Spanish tariff barriers removed, Mobile became a window to the world. One traveler reported that whereas barely any cotton had been exported from there in Spanish times, in 1824, 60,000 bales made their way to market.²²⁸ To the west, with Natchez as the commercial capital, exports flowed down the Tennessee to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. The eastern inhabitants on the Tensas cried that those vast distances of “” howling wilderness with its usual inhabitants of savages and beasts of prey”” separated them from the capital in Natchez.²²⁹ Political considerations helped to resolve at least part of the issue. Illinois and Indiana were soon to be admitted into the U.S. as free states, and southern

²²⁵ Mike Bunn. [*Early Alabama: An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 41.

²²⁶ Mike Bunn. [*Early Alabama: An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 32.

²²⁷ Daniel S. Dupre. [*Alabama's Frontiers and the Rise of the Old South. A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier*](#). Malcolm Rohrbough and Walter Nugent, editors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018, p. 256.

²²⁸ Auguste Levasseur. John D. Godman, trans. [*Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825; or Journal of a Voyage to the United States*](#). Vol. II. Philadelphia: Carey and Lea. 1829, p.85

²²⁹ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [*Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 62.

power brokers wished to balance them with two slave-holding states. In consequence, the Mississippi Territory was divided by Congress into an eastern and western part, although east-west dividing lines were also considered.²³⁰

Many arrivals illegally homesteaded Alabama lands. One of the most prevalent practices was to settle on public lands and anticipate preferential treatment. In some cases, they illegally homesteaded on indigenous lands as tribal authority fragmented and weakened. In other cases, they chose their preferred holdings even as surveying was taking place and before land offices offered the initial sections up from auction. Squatters generally hoped to secure their holdings legally, oftentimes succeeding at auction, or if their land holds were less desirable, purchasing at a lower price after initial auction fervor subsided. A law of 1807 extended rights to squatters who had already arrived while enjoining further illegal occupation.²³¹ But should they not succeed, squatters could simply uproot and move on. Indeed, one historian found that of 200 Madison County landholders of record in 1815, only 16 percent remained on their land in 1830.²³²

U. S. land policy on the expanding frontier, in Madison County, the Tennessee Valley, and Alabama as territory and young state was one of vacillating ambivalence. Sometimes, squatters would be driven off lands they had improved; other times, their status as tenants awaiting legal status was accepted. As often as they were reviled as disorderly and dissolute frontiersmen staying a step in from of lawmen and tax officials, they were recognized as responsible, stable citizens who had simply faster than the government's program of survey and sale could accommodate them. Certainly, relying on the sale of public lands for needed revenue, the federal

²³⁰ Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: [The Making of an American State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 60.; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. *[Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 63.

²³¹ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. *[The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#)*. Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p.10.

²³² Mike Bunn. Early Alabama: *[An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 38.

government recognized that the improvements of squatters on their lands raised the value of other lands in the public domain.²³³

Land cessions in 1801, 1805, and 1806 by the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee set the stage for the formal disposition of public lands in the Mississippi Territory. Procedures for disposition were governed by the [Land Ordinance of 1785](#).²³⁴ After a cession of indigenous land, the ordinance dictated that any pre-existing claims first be resolved. Once those were cleared, ceded land was surveyed and divided into *townships* six miles square and further subdivided into 36 *sections* of 640 acres each (one square mile). In the Tensaw region of what would become south Alabama. Choctaw cession secured by the treaties of [Fort Adams](#) (1801) and [Mount Dexter](#) (1805) permitted some of the earliest federal surveys in the region to proceed within the St. Stephens land district.²³⁵ By 1810, Huntsville would emerge as the pre-eminent settlement in the eastern half of the Mississippi Territory.

The treaties negotiated with the Choctaw and Chickasaw in the first years of the nineteenth century represented a diplomatic relinquishment of rights by those nations, acknowledging federal access and securing travel corridors such as the Natchez Trace. These agreements, however, did not in themselves produce surveyable lands for disposition under the terms of the Land Ordinance system. Those floodgates were opened early in the Tensaw region by the Choctaw and somewhat later by the Cherokee in the Tennessee Valley. First developments in the Valley

²³³ Daniel Dupre, "[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#)," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), p. 225.

²³⁴ Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: [The Making of an American State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 40; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. *[Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44.

²³⁵ "[Treaty of Fort Adams](#)." *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. Online; "[Treaty with the Choctaw, 1801](#)." *[Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#)*. Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services; Adam Hodson. *[Letters from North America Written During a Tour in the Unites States and Canada](#)*. 2 Vols. London: Hurst, Robinson and Company, 1824, v. 1, p. 143.; Edwin C. Bridges, *[Alabama: The Making of an American State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 40; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. *[Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#)*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44; "[Treaty with the Choctaw, 1805](#)." *[Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#)*. Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services.

followed the Cherokee treaties of [Tellico](#) (1798, [1804](#)) and [Washington](#) (January 7, 1806), which extinguished Indigenous title to substantial portions of the eastern Tennessee Valley south of the river.²³⁶ With title thus removed, federal surveyors could lay out township grids and beginning in 1809 these newly surveyed lands were offered for public sale through the Nashville Land Office. The best tracts were quickly acquired by speculators and by men of capital, while only a portion of the resident squatters succeeded in securing legal title. In this manner, as Edwin C. Bridges has observed, a dichotomy emerged between the emerging patrician class and poorer Alabamians — a division that would express itself repeatedly in the state’s political life over the ensuing decades.²³⁷

When the Alabama lands went on the market, amendments to the ordinance permitted a minimum purchase of 160 acres (one quarter section). Initially at public auction, the land was sold to the highest bidder, giving the upper hand to patrician immigrants from the plantation south. Subsequently, remaining land could be purchased at \$2 per acre, \$1.64 per acre if paying cash — an amount later reduced to \$1.25 an acre payable over 4 years.²³⁸

Around Big Spring in what would later become the heart of Huntsville, a small community of squatters had settled. The site was generally known as Hunt’s Spring, after [John Hunt](#) who built his cabin there.²³⁹ When the land went up for auction, John Hunt’s land was snapped up by prominent Georgia planter and lawyer, [Leroy Pope](#). After moving to the Territory, Pope Chose the name Twickenham, after a prominent London neighborhood, for the land around Hunt’s Spring. The small famers of the

²³⁶ “[Treaty with the Cherokee](#)”, 1798) [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services; “[Treaty with the Choctaw](#), 1805,” [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services;

²³⁷ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 42; J. Mills Thornton III. [Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama 1800 – 1860](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, p. 7.

²³⁸ Edwin C. Bridges, [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 41; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.44.

²³⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, pp. 73; Edward Chambers Betts. [Early History of Huntsville Alabama: 1804-1870](#), p. xxv.

area were offended at the audacity. When the planters nominated a slate of legislators for the 1811 session of the Mississippi Territory, the small farmers nominated their own slate, which swept to victory. Their first action in the legislative session was to sponsor and pass legislation changing the name of the settlement to [Huntsville](#). The small farmers would command the legislature for the remainder of the territorial era and the wealthy planters and merchants would not win an election for seven years.²⁴⁰ By 1810, the newly established county of Madison was one of the most populous areas in the Mississippi Territory. The commercial rudiments of a crude village emerged around the Huntsville spring. Settlers took their corn to the first grist mill there. Tanneries and brick yards could also be found around the small town. Cotton gins were in operation; doctors and lawyers opened their offices, and merchants sold the most basic of necessities often shipped by wagon from the east.²⁴¹

In the aftermath of the first land cessions, the Chickasaw complained to the U.S. government that as many as 5,000 settlers were illegally on their remaining lands. In response, the federal authorities constructed [Fort Hampton](#) at the mouth of the Elk River where it enters the Tennessee and sent troops under the command of Return J. Meigs to evict the squatters. But the removals were not always permanent. In 1816, government agent Barker reported as many as 300 families were living around the Muscle Shoals area. In that same year, the Chickasaw and Cherokee made additional cessions north of the river, retaining only modest reservations. The area was open for survey, sale, and settlement by settlers.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ J. Mills Thornton III. [*Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama 1800 – 1860*](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, p. 9; Edwin C. Bridges, [*Alabama: The Making of an American State*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 65; Dupre, Daniel S. [*Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840*](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.37.

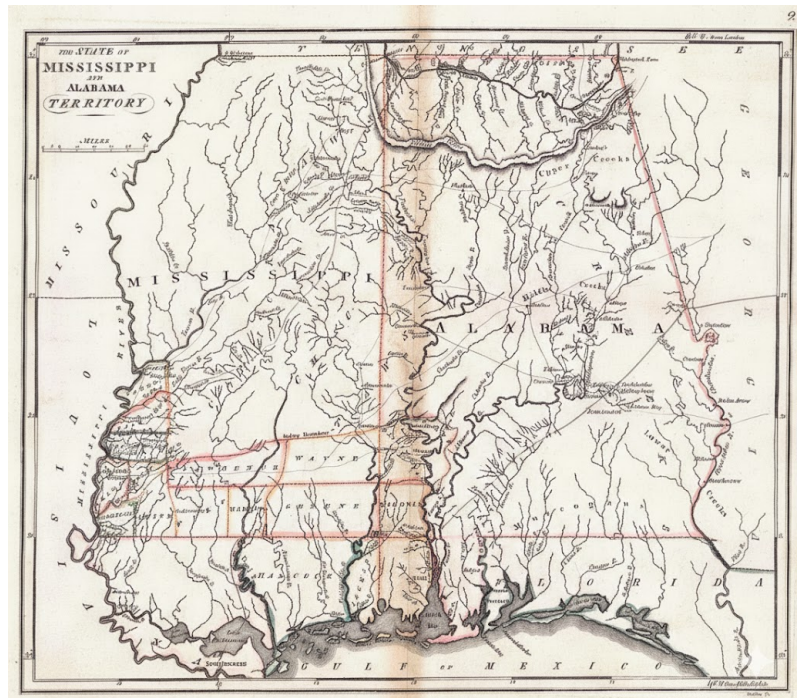
²⁴¹ Dupre, Daniel S. [*Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840*](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, pp.22.

²⁴² Harry E. Wallace. [*History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25; Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)*](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 3.

The Alabama Territory

On March 1, 1817, Congress divided the Mississippi Territory and an act on March 3, the western portion was organized into the Alabama Territory. Mississippi became a slave state. President Monroe appointed former Georgia Senator [William Wyatt Bibb](#) as the first territorial governor. St. Stephens, the county seat of the old sprawling Washington County became the first capital. By 1817, the town could boast hotels in city center, a theater, land office, newspaper, and a bank. St. Stephens even had a school for its youth, the Washington Academy, chartered in 1811. Huntsville was also emerging. The Huntsville Theatre built on land donated by LeRoy Pope hosted the appearance of the first professional actors, under the direction of Noah Miller Ludlow, to appear in Alabama.²⁴³

The first session of the legislature met in January 1818 in which were represented the counties of Baldwin, Clarke, Madison, Monroe, Mobile, Montgomery, and Washington.²⁴⁴ In the early years, political and economic power was largely wielded by a coterie of wealthy tobacco planters and businessmen, formerly from the [Broad River](#) area of Georgia. Among their



25 Alabama Territory and State of Mississippi 1817

²⁴³ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 140.

²⁴⁴ Willis Brewer. [Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872.](#) Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872, p. 38; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State.](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 63; Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama.](#) United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913., p. 8 Google Books, p. 17.

number were Governor Bibb, and [Charles Tait](#), both former Senators from Georgia, LeRoy Pope, and [John Williams Walker](#), all of whom would hold prominent economic and political stature in the early history of Alabama.²⁴⁵

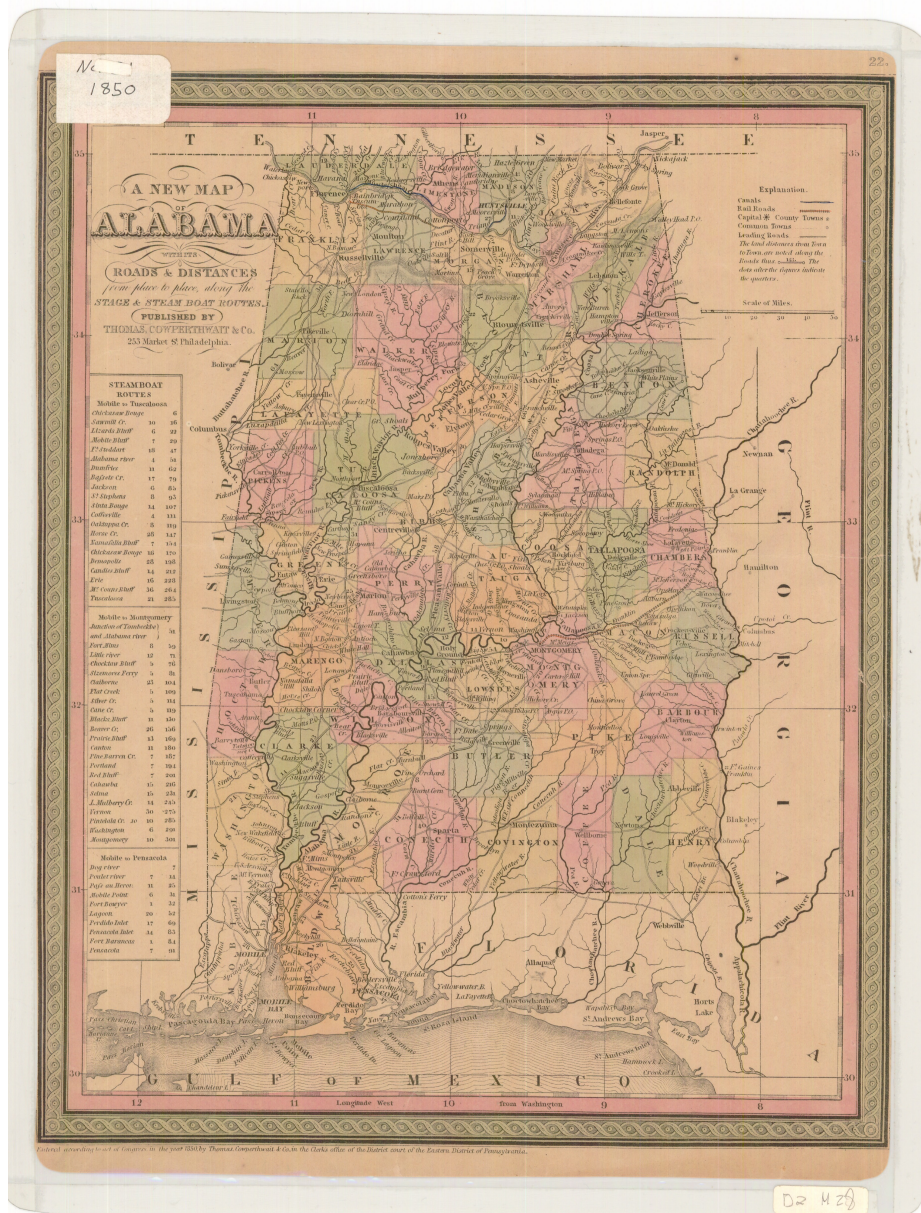
The census of 1818 revealed sufficient population in Alabama to qualify for statehood and the legislature petitioned Congress for admission. After some deliberations, the first capital was established at the new town of [Cahaba](#) at the confluence of the Cahaba and Tallapoosa rivers; Huntsville was designated as the temporary capital until the new state house was readied. Still in Congress at the time, Georgian Tait sponsored the bill for statehood and President James Monroe signed it into law March 2, 1819.²⁴⁶ Thirty nine delegates from the 20 counties assembled in Huntsville in July for the constitutional convention. Eight of the delegates were from Madison County, and one of them – John Williams Walker – served as president. [Hugh McVay](#), planter and close friend of the Huntsville elite represented Lauderdale County. Congratulating the delegates at the end of their work, president Walker proclaimed the Alabama constitution to be “emphatically republican” advancing the “first principle of liberty: It guards the equal rights of all.”²⁴⁷ By the end of the year the first elections had been held, a constitution drafted, and sent to Congress where it was approved. With the constitution approved, Alabama was admitted to the union as a slave state, the 22nd state of the United States.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Mike Bunn. [*Early Alabama: An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826.*](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 76; Dupre, Daniel S. [*Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840.*](#) Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.28; Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\).*](#) Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 1.

²⁴⁶ Edwin C. Bridges, [*Alabama: The Making of an American State.*](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 61.

²⁴⁷ Dupre, Daniel S. [*Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840.*](#) Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.48.

²⁴⁸ Edwin C. Bridges, [*Alabama: The Making of an American State.*](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 64.



Chapter 2

Tennessee Valley: The Early Statehood Setting

In the first decade of the state's history, Huntsville was a bright and shining light, a wealthy city of cotton planters, smaller farmers, and merchants situated ten miles from the Tennessee River and on the main road connecting to Tuscaloosa and the Warrior River and downstream to Mobile. About one sixth of the state's population could be found in Madison County; those citizens contributed a quarter of the taxes collected by state authorities. Geography conspired to limit the connectedness of the Alabama population. Between the Tennessee River and the rivers that flowed through western central Alabama was a highland barrier that impeded north – south transportation and communication. The northern part of the state, settled early with its rich cotton lands, was more commercially aligned with New Orleans than Mobile. Antebellum efforts to link the northern and southern parts of the state with clay roads through the forests, canal initiatives, and railroads were largely ineffective.²⁴⁹

Huntsville and Madison County.

Following the Cherokee land cession of November 16, 1805, of a triangle of land between the Tennessee River and the southern border of the state of Tennessee, the Territorial legislature established Madison County, with Huntsville as the county seat.²⁵⁰ From its beginnings, Huntsville grew quickly even as richer farmlands lay to the west and south. The Cherokee observed the terms of the cession in the Madison country area, whereas they and the Chickasaw more tenaciously defended their turf in Muscle Shoals area.²⁵¹ In the first round of land sales, the Georgia planters purchased vast estates in Madison County purposefully for cotton. They brought enslaved workers with them and purchased more upon arrival. By 1816, cotton

²⁴⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1951, p. 300.

²⁵⁰ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [*The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819*](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1961. P. 456.

²⁵¹ Edward Chambers Betts. [*Early History of Huntsville Alabama: 1804-1870*](#), p. xviii; William Lindsey McDonald. *A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Bluewater Publications: 2003 p. 219.

production in Madison may already have reached 10,000 bales. As was the case in the rest of Alabama, wealthy planters grew short staple cotton as their primary crop, with corn for food and fodder as the secondary crop. Small farmers practiced the converse, with most of the land in corn for subsistence and the remainder in cotton as the family cash crop.²⁵² The “[Alabama Fever](#)” that swept the east coast was evident in the Madison County land sales. In 1818, all the land on both sides of the Tennessee, previously ceded by the Cherokee and Chickasaw and now surveyed, was offered for sale in Huntsville, the purchase price exceeding seven million dollars. It was one of the biggest speculative land offerings ever offered. Land sold for as much as fifty to hundred dollars an acre at public auction. Some \$1.2 million of the infamous [Mississippi script](#), from Yazoo speculation spree, was used in down payment.²⁵³ Loans were taken by many at usurious rates, the legislature having dissolved all restrictions on private contract interest rates prior to the sale. The speculative frenzy knew no bounds. One Huntsville lot sold for \$60 in 1816, was purchased for \$700 in 1818 and sold again within the year for \$1,400.²⁵⁴

The Tennessee Valley was still a hard scrabble place as Alabama moved toward statehood. When available, even the most basic goods and services were difficult to obtain. In the early winter of 1816, storekeeper James Crump returned to Huntsville from an arduous trip upriver from Mobile with 2,000 pounds of goods to sell and barter. Included in his shipment were 1,000 Christmas oranges for the populace. Poling the flatboat upriver from Mobile, stopping in St. Stephens to purchase additional supplies, the goods were unloaded in Tuscaloosa at the fall line on the Black Warrior River. From there, he and his men transferred the merchandise to wagons and trekked eight days overland to the shore opposite Ditto’s Landing, crossing the

²⁵² Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p.58.

²⁵³ Kennedy, Brenden Edward. “[Mississippi Stocks and the 1795 Yazoo Land Sale: Slavery, Securities Markets, Native American Dispossession, and the Panic of 1819 in Alabama.](#)” *The Alabama Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July 2021), pp. 203+

²⁵⁴ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, pp. 52-53; Rhorbough, Malcom J. [Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 283; Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, pp. 43-44.

Tennessee and making the last ten miles into Huntsville. Among the treasures: sugar, brown and white; precious coffee, rum and wine, as well as assorted dry goods. Crump was cheered to have lost fewer than a dozen oranges to spoilage.²⁵⁵ Supplies might also be brought through the Valley of Virginia by way of Knoxville; but the favorite route during the 'twenties seems to have been down the Ohio River to the Cumberland River, up the Cumberland to Nashville, and across country from that there. Flour, pork, and whisky could be brought from Kentucky and the Northwest in this way, as could manufactures which went overland from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and then down the Ohio.²⁵⁶

Settlers poured in to begin their lives anew. The rapidly growing populations of Lawrence, Lauderdale, Limestone and Morgan counties added further to the political leverage of the Tennessee Valley.²⁵⁷ By 1820, Alabama had attracted a population of 125,000, about a third of whom were enslaved and brought there involuntarily primarily to work the cotton fields. Madison, with 16,000 inhabitants was the largest county, and the Tennessee Valley was Alabama's most populous region.²⁵⁸ In Madison County by 1820, there were 38 merchandise stores and 20 grist mills. One hundred and forty nine cotton gins prepared the harvest for market. Twenty distilleries fed the regional appetite for whiskey, and one brewery supplied the alehouses. There were four sawmills to meet booming demand.²⁵⁹ A brief look at the origins of Florence, Tuscumbia, and Courtland will help to explain the spread of social institutions and infrastructure in this raw yet vibrant territory.

Florence and Lauderdale County.

Frontiersmen, trappers, squatters, and hardy settlers penetrated the northwest corner of what would become Alabama and Lauderdale County well before the cession of Chickasaw and Cherokee lands. By 1810, as many as five thousand illegal settlers may have been in the Chickasaw territory. In

²⁵⁵ Rohr, Nancy M. "[Alabama Fever.](#)" *Special Issue. A History of Early Settlement: Madison County before Statehood, 1808 – 1819. Huntsville Historical Review* (2008), p. 1.

²⁵⁶ [Alabama . Historical . Historic America](#). Accessed January 2, 2025.

²⁵⁷ Mike Bunn. [Early Alabama: An Illustrated Guide to the Formative Years, 1798-1826](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 64.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Perkins Abernethy. [The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828](#). Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Historical and Patriotic Series, No. 6. Montgomery AL: Brown Printing Company, 1922, p. 57.

²⁵⁹ Frances Cabaniss Roberts. [The Founding of Alabama: Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 161.

fact, between 1809 and 1811, soldiers were repeatedly sent out from the Elk River's [Fort Hampton](#) to push the intruders away. And while the Lauderdale County early place names lacked the resonance of Hunt's Spring and Ditto's Landing, Johnathan Bailey was ensconced at [Bailey Springs](#) by 1810. Charles Littleton, a Revolutionary War soldier, brought three slaves with him from Tennessee to help his family clear a holding on Cypress Creek.²⁶⁰



27 Lauderdale County, Alabama, from Henry S. Tanner's A New Map of the State of Alabama (Philadelphia, 1823).

Many of the wealthy founders of Huntsville had a hand in the rise of Florence and the other cities at the bend of the Tennessee River. One of the more powerful investor groups was the [Cypress Land Company](#), formed five weeks after the county of Lauderdale was created in March 1818.²⁶¹ Its investors included Colonel [James Madison](#), Sr. (father of the President) and General Andrew Jackson. General John Coffee, Surveyor General of Alabama, was one of the land company trustees and played a key role in selection and development of the lands.²⁶² In a letter in 1817, Andrew Jackson had pointed out the attractions of sites on both sides of the Tennessee where the Jackson

²⁶⁰ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author, 1968, pp. 3-4.

²⁶¹ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 1.

²⁶² Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 82.

Military Road crossed the river, connecting the region to Nashville to the north, and New Orleans to the south.²⁶³ The other trustees were LeRoy Pope, former Virginia planter and Huntsville founder; [James Jackson](#), Tennessean, breeder of racehorses, and future leader of the Alabama Whig Party. [John McKinley](#), attorney in Huntsville and Virginian by birth; Dabney Morris of Virginia; James Madison Sr., and John Childress of Tennessee.²⁶⁴ For \$85,235, the company purchased from the government 5,515 acres of land between what is now Wilson Dam and the mouth of Cypress Creek. Carefully selected by John Coffee the elevated tableland offered protection from flooding and was an excellent business site.²⁶⁵ The assets of the Cypress Land Company were divided into 408 shares; the shareholders were to bear the expense of marketing, surveying, and registering the land.²⁶⁶ To ensure their certitude that a township at the foot of the shoals would develop as a power commercial city, “the entrepot of the Tennessee,” Andrew Jackson, James Madison Sr., and other speculators snatched up the other potential townsites on the north side of the river.²⁶⁷

From the perspective of sixty years, Florence civic leader Basil Wood painted a picture of the vision and enthusiasm that sparked the speculative fever of the Cypress Land Company investors:

Cast your eye over all that part of Alabama and Mississippi for two hundred miles South, and then along the Tennessee river north, East and West, within a range of fifty miles of this magnificent stream, and where do you find on the face of the globe, in its natural state, so grand and beautiful a country as that which was tributary to the Tennessee. At that time Nashville was a town of not much greater pretensions than Florence is now. Memphis was a mere Ferry known as Chickasaw Bluff. Louisville had not more than four or five thousand inhabitants. All this vast country, soon to be populated with its millions, and capable of sustaining its millions more, was thrown open to, and being rapidly settled up, by the Anglo-Saxon; the older

²⁶³ William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications: 2003 p. 3.

²⁶⁴ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999- and accessible via Rootsweb.

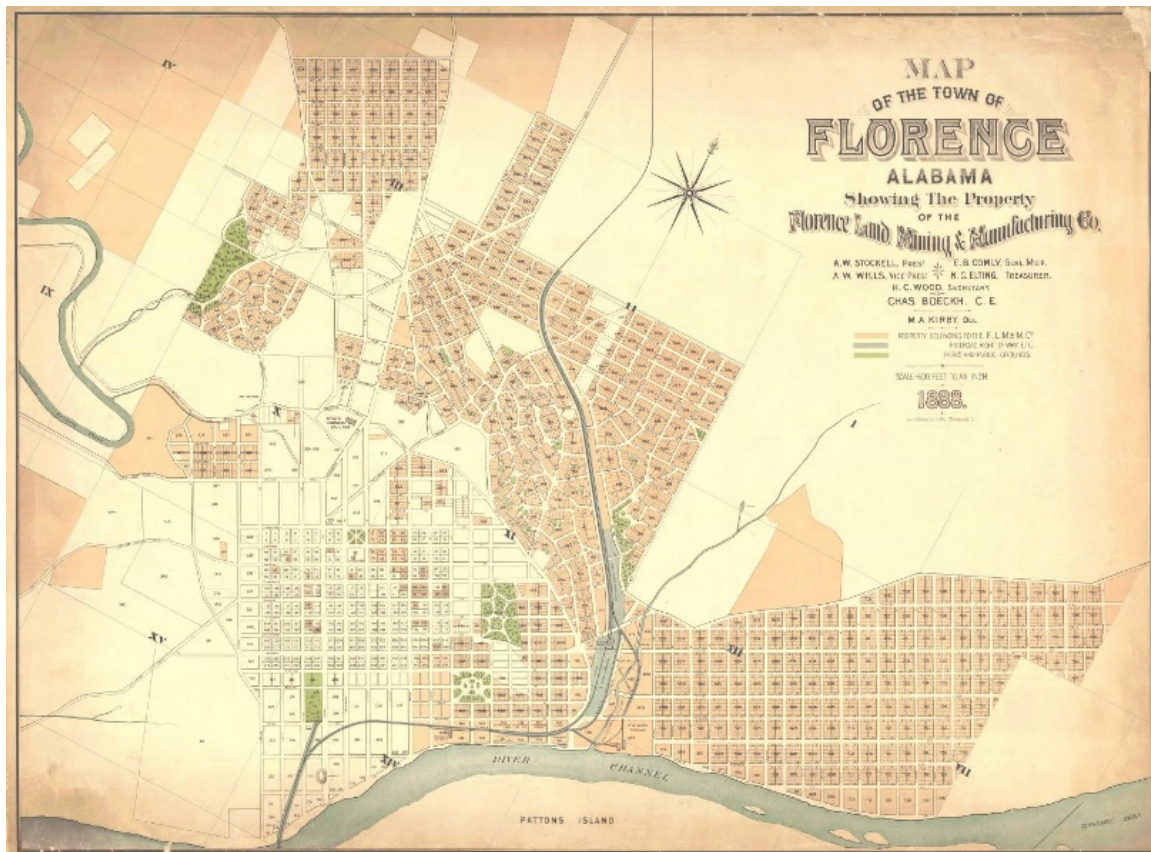
²⁶⁵ William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications: 2003 p. 2.

²⁶⁶ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.45.

*States were pouring their emigrants, in almost one continuous stream, into its rich and inviting lands. The cultivation of cotton had just begun; it brought a high price in the market. Here was to be the great cotton belt of the world.*²⁶⁸

And thus, was born the city of Florence, Alabama. In 1823, John Coffee moved his land office to Florence from Huntsville, and the Cypress Land Company's offices were housed in the same building. The city was laid off by the Italian immigrant Ferdinand Sannoner who worked for Coffee as an



28 J. J. Sannoner Plan of the Town of Florence and the Lands Adjacent Belonging to the Cypress Land Company (1832).

engineer. Early sources suggest that the investors gave to Sannoner the prerogative of naming the city Florence in honor of his own home on the Arno River. The first lots sold in 1819; the initial sale lasted several days and brought in almost \$225,000.²⁶⁹ As Florence was laid out, the four main streets were

²⁶⁸ W. B. Wood. [Historical Address of Hon. Wm. B. Wood, July 4, 1876](#). As published in the *Florence Gazette* July to September 1876,

²⁶⁹ Albert Burton Moore. [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 85; William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications: 2003 p. 4.

to all to be 150 feet wide, all others 99 feet, and they were to cross in a right-angle grid. Coffee and Sannoner's design divided Florence into squares. Sections were reserved for a future college, a female seminary, a public park, and a market. Land was set aside for a courthouse, clerks' offices, a jail, and a cemetery (the latter outside the town proper). In 1823, those lots were sold, along with a few others for a total of about \$58,000. In the first five years, 180 lots were sold. In the first round, the ferry lot on the river had been purchased by John J. Winston for \$10,000²⁷⁰ Plans for a bridge across the Tennessee were also drawn, but that did not occur.²⁷¹ Lots were also set aside prospectively for a cotton factory and livery stable. Lots were apparently deeded to the Baptists and the Methodists for churches, but the Presbyterians had to purchase theirs from Cypress. On January 7, 1826, the act that established Florence as a corporate city was approved.²⁷²

The trustees of the Cypress Land Company were a distinguished group. [John Coffee](#) would live in Florence at his Hickory Hill Plantation until his death in 1833. James Jackson's [The Forks of Cypress](#), north of Florence was a renowned racehorse breeding and racing site. Active politically, Jackson served in both the Alabama House and Senate, serving as President of the latter. He would die in 1840. Trustee John Childress was an associate of Jackson's from their days in Tennessee; owner of two lots in Florence, he had also been active in the 1818 land purchases in Huntsville. [John McKinley](#) would become a United States Senator and subsequently served the Supreme Court as the state's first Associate Justice. He died in 1852. LeRoy Pope, a founder of Huntsville, was president of the Planters and Merchants Bank there. He died in Huntsville in 1844. [Thomas Bibb](#) became a wealthy planter in Limestone County. Following the death of his brother William Wyatt Bibb, he served as Alabama's second governor. Less is known about Virginian Dabney Morris of Nottoway County and another horse breeding enthusiast. He

²⁷⁰ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999; Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 8.

²⁷¹ Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p.p. 2-3.

²⁷² William Lindsey McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications: 2003 p. 5; Edward L. Bowen, [Legacies of the Turf: A Century of Great Breeders](#). Lexington KY: Blood-Horse Publications, 2004, n. p.; John Bedford, Jno. Sappington, "[A Tour in 1807 Down the Cumberland, Ohio and Mississippi from Nashville to New Orleans](#)." *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 1919), pp. 40-68.

was a close associate of the father of President James Madison. James Madison Sr. was one of the leading investors of the company, owning more than 20 Florence lots at one time. While many settled in Florence and became leading citizens of the Tennessee Valley, many others purchased their lands on speculation, most to be disappointed in the decline of prices following the floodtide of initial sales and the Panic of 1819²⁷³ By 1820, the population of Lauderdale County was 4,763. By 1830, as La Grange College opened its gates, the population stood at 10,781, of whom 3,795 were enslaved.²⁷⁴ In her writings, Ann Royall regaled the young town of Florence, the diversity of its first settlers, and the wealth of the elite, including General Coffee and James Jackson, said to be the wealthiest man in the state.²⁷⁵ Among the early newspapers in the county were the *Florence Gazette* and the *Florence Register and Public Advertiser*. By 1840 the *Florence Enquirer* was publishing. Surviving copies of those papers provide insight into the life and times of the valley. The first ferry between Florence and the opposite bank of the Tennessee was operating by 1818. The landing on the south bank of the Tennessee took the name South Florence. James Jackson and John McKinney operated the ferry on the north bank; George Cockburn was one of the operators of the south bank landing.²⁷⁶

Tuscumbia and Franklin, Colbert Counties.

General Jackson and Coffee had camped on the Oka Kapassa Bluff in 1817 enroute to confront the marauding Seminoles in Florida. They

²⁷³ William Lindsey McDonald. [*A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama*](#). Bluewater Publications: 2003 pp. 11-15; Harry E. Wallace. [*History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*](#); Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)*](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author, 1968, pp. 4-8. Garrett helpfully enumerates some of the local descendants of those original Cypress Creek shareholders. Even James Birney, from Huntsville, who became a vocal advocate of abolition, participated in the initial frenzy, buying at least one lot for \$1,300; see Garrett, pp. 7-8; [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 205, for notes on James and William Moore Jackson, his son.

²⁷⁴ Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)*](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author, 1968, p. 10.

²⁷⁵ Anne Royall. [*Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects....*](#) Washington: n.p. 1830, pp.. 143 – 150. Royall provides a lengthy description of Florence and its citizens.

²⁷⁶ Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)*](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author, 1968, pp. 12-15, 20.

marveled about the economic prospects of the land below the shoals and resolved to become players in the region's future. After Coffee had surveyed the ceded lands, General Jackson purchased almost the entirety of available land between Oka Kapassa and York's Bluff (future site of Sheffield). He then offered lots for sale.²⁷⁷ A small community was established at Oka Kapassa by 1818 and some 10-15 families were living in the village by 1820. Initially, the settlement was incorporated by a variant spelling of that indigenous word but evolved shortly into Big Spring and then in 1822 was renamed Tuscumbia to honor a noted Chickasaw leader.²⁷⁸

Like Florence, sitting athwart the Jackson Military Road connecting Nashville to New Orleans, and fixed on the head of navigation of the Tennessee River, Tuscumbia was thought to occupy a strategic location. But the 43 miles of shoal water would limit the river's viability as a trade route, and both cities grew less rapidly than the initial speculators and first settlers had hoped. By 1824, some 1,000 were reported to be living in Tuscumbia. Four hotels were in place to accommodate through travelers down the military road and stage routes that passed through the city.²⁷⁹ In 1821, the *Tuscumbia Advertiser* began publication.

In 1820 Huntsville was made the terminus of the first stage line in Alabama, connecting with Knoxville, Nashville and beyond. It was extended to Tuscumbia in 1825, with connections through to Kentucky and Ohio as well. However, transportation to the south remained arduous. There were no easy portages to south-flowing rivers, and the Natchez Trace was too rough to accommodate carriages. So, south to New Orleans the mail still was carried by horseback.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times*](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935 p. 39.

²⁷⁸ [*Keller, Capt. Arthur Henley, Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical. Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, pp. 425-431; "Tuscumbia."*](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Last accessed August 16, 2024. See also: Keller, Capt. Arthur Henley. *History of Tuscumbia, Alabama*. Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, 1981. [Online version here](#). Rootsweb.com. Accessed November 3, 2025.

²⁷⁹ Harry E. Wallace. [*History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*](#). A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily* February 25, 1999.

²⁸⁰ [*Alabama Roads. Historic America*](#). Last accessed August 16, 2024

Courtland and Lawrence County.

Courtland and the nearby village of Leighton also warrant noting in the future rise of La Grange College in this region. Like the rest of the western Tennessee river valley, the first settlers probably squatted lands in this area, 24 miles from Tuscumbia, as early as 1810. The Courtland Land Company purchased the property for 300 lots in 1818 and the town of Courtland was incorporated in December 1819, just before the granting of Alabama statehood. Some 15 miles away lay the village of Leighton, also first settled around 1810 and initially called the “Crossroads” because of its location on the intersection the Byler Road and the Tuscumbia-Decatur Road of two important early stagecoach lines,. Subsequently the village would come to be known by the name of its first postmaster, William Leigh. It would assume some importance as a cotton-shipping center with the arrival of the railroads a few years ahead.²⁸¹

Early Infrastructure in the Tennessee Valley

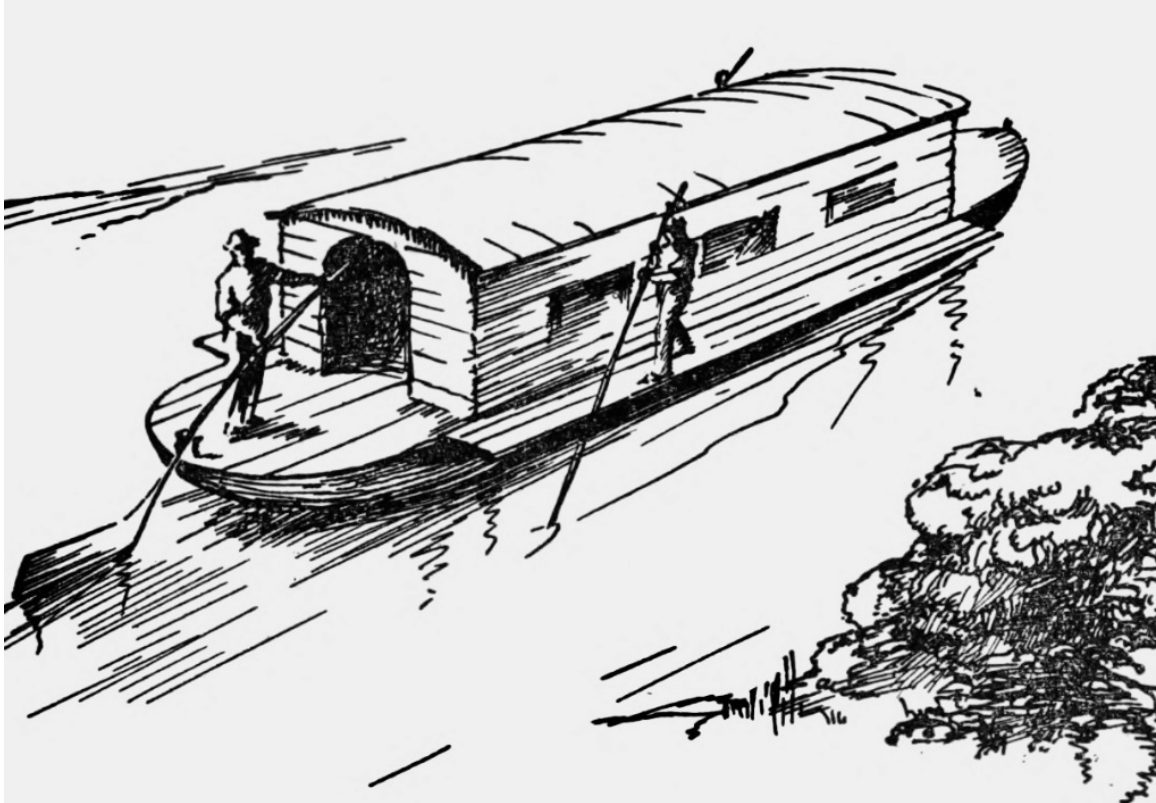
The Tennessee River. As Huntsville, Florence, Tuscumbia, and the other cities in the region began to develop along the banks of the Tennessee, each had to come to grips with impediments to navigation on that strategic watercourse. Flowing 650 miles from the confluence of the French Broad and Holston Rivers near Knoxville to its junction with the Ohio near Paducah, the river had served as an important route for the indigenous tribes of the country and had proven amenable to canoe-borne travel and commerce for centuries. Expert boatmen were able to navigate the rapids, rocks, currents of the river even in low water. But even as the threat of indigenous resistance faded, for the settlers, eager to move heavy goods, families and livestock into the region, the river remained a formidable hurdle. Those same factors surmounted by the light draft canoe—uncertain and quickly changing depth, dangerous currents and whirlpools, and rocks and shoals—were anathema to the technologies of the early flatboats and keelboats.²⁸² Cotton seeking the

²⁸¹ “Leighton, Alabama”, *Wikipedia*. Accessed August 31, 2024; “Courtland,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Accessed August 31, 2024; Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 63.

²⁸² J. Haden Alldrege, Mildred Vernon Spottswood, Vera V. Anderson, John Goff, and Robert LaForge. [*A History of Navigation on the Tennessee River System: An Interpretation of the*](#)

market in New Orleans could only navigate through the shoal waters for one to two or three months of high water. Often planters could not get their cotton down the circuitous route to New Orleans in times when prices were most favorable.²⁸³

Before the days of the steamboat, cotton from the Tennessee Valley made the long and arduous journey to New Orleans. The trips were always one way; there are no records of upstream keelboat journeys on the Mississippi River back to the Tennessee River. Of course, the keelboat was



29 Keelboat

often navigated upstream for shorter distances by their crews. Crewmen would propel their boat by means of poles and walking down cleared walkways to the stern. Oars and sails were sometimes employed as were towlines. Ropes attached to trees or other shoreline objects would be tugged by winch or crew, the boat inching forward. Adventurous crew would pilot Ohio keelboats upstream to the head of navigation at Muscle Shoals, freighting welcome but expensive goods for the population. Among the boats welcomed

[*Economic Influence Of this River System on the Tennessee Valley*](#). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1937, pp. 4 -10.

²⁸³ Albert Burton Moore, [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 302.

in the newspaper were the *Pittsburgh*, *Choctaw*, and the *General Jackson*. Local keels with local crews would deliver goods upstream from the shoals. Between April 1836, and December 1837, five keelboats made eighteen trips to various stops on the upper Tennessee. Among the boats: *French Broad*, *Little River* and *East Tennessean*.²⁸⁴

Nevertheless, in a primitive territory, the waterways were considered, and prized, as thoroughfares for both people and goods. In the early years of Alabama as territory and state, there were serious investigations into linking the river via the Coosa and its tributaries to the Alabama River as well as to the Black Warrior on the western side of the shoals. Likewise, while the technologies and resources were never there, entrepreneurs, politicians and engineers threw themselves into taming the turbulence at Muscle Shoals that brought river commerce to a halt. Vision clouded reality. The engineering success of the [Erie Canal](#) was there for everyone to see and celebrate.²⁸⁵ The introduction of steam navigation to America's waterways heightened the prospects of economic revolution and added to the sense of urgency. Steamboats plying the Mississippi River as early as 1811 fanned regional imaginations. As the editor of the *Huntsville American Statesmen* wrote in 1811, "Whenever steamboat navigation is open from above the Shoals to New Orleans, North Alabama and East Tennessee will be as favorably situated as any other section of the Western country."²⁸⁶ The first steamboat, the *Osage*, reached Florence in 1821. In 1828, the intrepid *Atlas* rode the spring high waters over the Muscle Shoals and reached Knoxville, the first steamboat to reach that city.²⁸⁷

Yet, the task of taming the river was formidable for the technology of the day. Three challenging sets of rapids and rocks above Florence – Elk River, Big Muscle, and Little Muscle – brought downriver commerce to a halt during most of the year and presented an impenetrable barrier to upstream travel. There remained the Waterloo, Bee Tree, and Colbert Shoals below

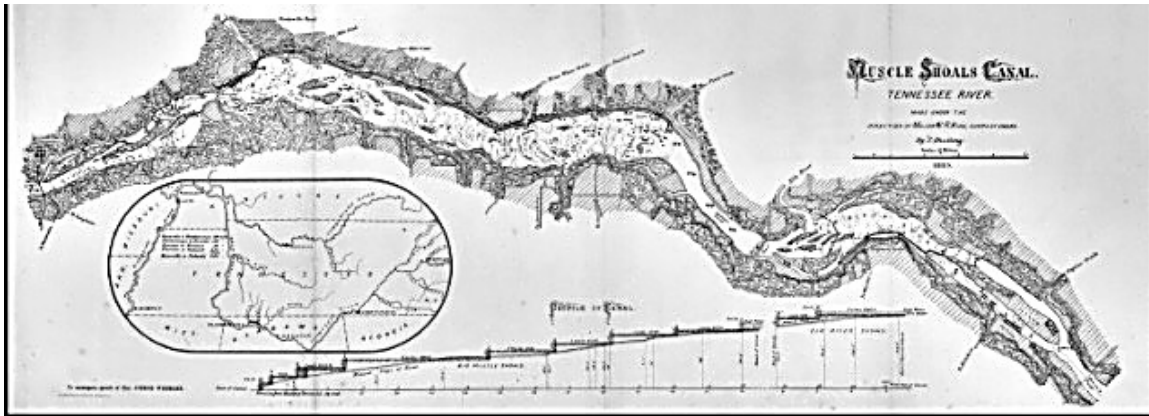
²⁸⁴ Donald Davidson. [The Tennessee. Volume 1. The Old River: Frontier to Secession](#). Nashville: J. S. Sanders and Company, 1991, pp. 207-209.

²⁸⁵ Vicki Bell Rozema. [Roads, and Rails: The Influence of Transportation Needs and Internal Improvements on Cherokee Treaties and Removal From 1779 to 1838](#). Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2007, p. 40.

²⁸⁶ Robert Ernest McFarland Jr. [Of Time and the River: Economy, People and Environment in the Tennessee Valley, 1500-1990](#). PhD. Dissertation. University of Alabama. 1997.p. 94. (Cites *Huntsville Alabama Republican*, 1 June 1821).

²⁸⁷ "[Tennessee River System](#)," *Tennessee Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 01/24/2025.

Florence. From Athens to the shoals below Florence, the river dropped 200 feet. The thirty-seven miles above Florence featured the most severe fall of 137 feet. In some areas where the river fell 15 feet in



30 The Muscle Shoals

a mile, the roar of the rushing water could be heard for miles.²⁸⁸ Altogether, the Tennessee dropped 454 feet between Knoxville and Paducah.²⁸⁹ Even at the port of Florence, the river was tricky. In 1823, the *Thomas Jefferson* unloaded its passengers and cargo, and struck an obstruction in the river enroute to South Florence on the other bank. The steamboat sank in four hours without the loss of life.²⁹⁰

In 1824, [John Calhoun](#), Secretary of War, recommended improvements to navigation on the Tennessee River, including a canal around the Muscle Shoals.²⁹¹ A first survey to calculate possibilities was undertaken by [Ferdinand Sannoner](#) and Will Poussin in 1828. Two additional surveys followed.²⁹² Still reeling from the economic collapse occasioned by the [Panic of 1819](#), supporters of the canal were challenged to find their funding opportunities. The entire country had been hit hard by the economic crisis of 1819, and the Tennessee Valley was suffering the consequences of massive

²⁸⁸ W. L. McDonald, [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County](#), Bluewater Publications, 1997. *Alabama*, p. 95.

²⁸⁹ [TVA data](#)

²⁹⁰ Jill Knight Garrett, [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 12.

²⁹¹ Vicki Bell Rozema, [Roads, and Rails: The Influence of Transportation Needs and Internal Improvements on Cherokee Treaties and Removal From 1779 to 1838](#). Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2007, p. 46.

²⁹² Harry E. Wallace, [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily* February 25, 1999; W. L. McDonald, [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications, p. 96.

foreclosures on lands purchased at speculative prices. When the price of cotton plummeted, planters and farmers were unable to meet their mortgage obligations and hundreds of thousands of acres of prime farmland were returned to the government. Curiously, as cotton prices began to recover, those forfeited acres beckoned as a potential asset. In his last Congressional term before assuming the Alabama governorship in 1829, Representative Gabriel Moore of Huntsville engineered a solution. In 1828, Congress allocated 400,000 of those relinquished acres within Madison (31,921 acres), Limestone (89,481), Lawrence (134,711), Lauderdale (98,601), Franklin (78,899) to the state of Alabama, for sale at auction. The revenues obtained were to be used to fund the Muscle Shoals Canal.²⁹³

The Muscle Shoals Canal was part technological derring-do, part capitalist vision of economic development for the Valley. A Huntsville *Advocate* editorial in 1827 foresaw the Muscle Shoals canal:

*...opening new sources of wealth, and furnishing new objects of industry, to a hardy, persevering and enterprising population, sharpening their faculties and stimulating their energies. Navigation would give life to commerce, and new towns would spring up and an infinite variety of manufacturers would flourish where now, all is dreary and an unprofitable waste.*²⁹⁴

As designed, the canal was intended to permit navigation by steamboat of the river for six months of the year rather than only at floodtide. Unfortunately, the funds raised for the construction of canals through eighty miles of shoal water were insufficient for the monumental technological task at hand. In the throes of depression, land relief carried the day. State

²⁹³ Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 303; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.107; Frances Cabaniss Roberts, [The Founding of Alabama: Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 152. (For an in depth look at the use of the “Yazoo Script” and the funding of the canal, see Brenden Edward Kennedy, “[Mississippi Stocks and the 1795 Yazoo Land Sale: Slavery, Securities Markets, Native American Dispossession, and the Panic of 1819 in Alabama](#),” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July 2021), pp. 203-239 and Daniel Dupre, “[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#),” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May, 1990), pp. 215-240.

²⁹⁴ Daniel Dupre, “[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#),” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), p. 233.

commissioners set purchase prices for a third of the donated lands below \$1.25 an acre, and re-purchase preferences were given to those Alabamians who had previously relinquished their land. Canal developers had to realign their plans with the fiscal realities.²⁹⁵ In 1831, construction of the locks around Big Muscle Shoals began – almost inexplicably in the center of the fall line above Florence. As many as 600 enslaved workers from neighboring plantations worked on the construction until its completion in 1836. Over 14 miles long, with 17 locks sixty feet wide and six feet deep, with an average lift of five feet, the canal's design quickly proved to be unworkable. Unfortunately, locks were unapproachable most of the year from either direction because of unnavigable shoals. Additionally, with the locks too short for then current steamboat design, few boats were able to use it during its brief life. The canal was abandoned in 1838.²⁹⁶

Consequently, in the steamboat era, the Tennessee River was not an economically navigable waterway. From Florence to Paducah, steamboat traffic was efficient and economically viable during times of higher water. But from Decatur to Knoxville, steamboat travel and transport remained a risky endeavor on the treacherous river. The tumultuous stretch over the shoals remained a high-risk gamble in both directions. The double-handling required to move goods from above the fall line at Decatur to steamboat transport below at Tusculumbia added to costs and limited the economic viability of the region.²⁹⁷ The clamor for railroad adoptions in the region quickly became fevered. Wistful visions of a canal through the shoals resurfaced after the civil war. In 1871, a survey party assessed the prospects of a canal path from Brown's Ferry to Florence. Opined the *Columbia Herald* in June 1871: "It is a shame to our country and a disgrace to its legislation that this important work should be so long neglected. There is not another stream of its size in the

²⁹⁵ Daniel Dupre, "[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#)," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), p. 240.

²⁹⁶ W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications, pp.61, 96; Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 303; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p.107; Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 20.

²⁹⁷ David E. Lilienthal. "[Navigation on the Tennessee River](#)," *The Southern Economic Journal*, Vol IV, No. 4 (April 1938), pp. 399-400; Donald Davidson. [The Tennessee. Volume 1. The Old River: Frontier to Secession](#). Nashville: J. S. Sanders and Company, 1991, p. 250.

civilized world of so little use to navigation. It drains one of the richest and most fertile and productive sections in the country.”²⁹⁸

The Railroad. Even before the canal at Muscle Shoals succumbed to fiscal and engineering shortcomings, the planters of the Tennessee Valley embraced the technological revolution of rail as the means to break the constraints under which their agricultural economy labored. Above the Muscle Shoals, keelboats and flatboats could wait months for water sufficiently high to make the run to Florence and Tuscumbia where the deeper waters of the Tennessee began. Before 1820, the barges would be assembled there for the long, slow float to New Orleans. After 1820, the cotton bales would be piled aboard the steamboats or towed behind them to New Orleans as a flotilla. But above the fall line, the wait for high water over the shoals could be interminable, the voyage to the wharves at New Orleans long, and the shipping costs high. The planters in Madison, Limestone, Morgan and Lawrence counties fumed with frustration as conditions played havoc with their fortunes.

Planters throughout the region pondered the question of how to get the cotton bales efficiently to port? [David Hubbard](#) (1792-1874), planter, lawyer and legislator had read of an experimental short line railroad recently put into operation in Pennsylvania and traveled there to observe and ascertain whether rail could be a solution to the economic bottleneck of Muscle Shoals.²⁹⁹ Hubbard’s father, a Virginian, was an officer in the Continental Army. David Hubbard served in the War of 1812, moved to Madison County after the war, and studied law, passing the bar in 1820. Subsequently, after an interval in Florence, he moved to Mouton in Lawrence County which he represented in both the Alabama Senate and the House of Representatives. Afterwards, he moved to Courtland. A mercantilist, he was also a realtor, enriching himself buying and selling Chickasaw lands as they were being ceded. He operated the Kinlock plantation and was an ardent supporter of slavery.³⁰⁰

Colonel [Benjamin Sherrod](#) (1777-1847), a wealthy Franklin and Colbert county planter who managed several cotton plantations and other business enterprises (one of the most powerful steamboats plying the

²⁹⁸ Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)*](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 57.

²⁹⁹ N. P. Renfro. [*The Beginning of Railroads in Alabama*](#). Auburn, Alabama: Alabama Polytechnic Historic Studies. George Petrie, Ed. Fourth Series, p. 1.

³⁰⁰ “[David Hubbard](#),” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Last accessed September 22, 2024.

Mississippi River bore his name), was vitally interested in other technological solutions to getting cotton to market. Sherrod was a Whig politically. His plantations were maintained by hundreds of enslaved people.³⁰¹

Hubbard had read of one of the very earliest rail experiments in Pennsylvania, and visited the Mauch Chunk experiment that moved anthracite coal down a mountain grade to the canals below. Dropping almost 1,000 feet, seven cars of coal made the gravity-fed trip down the nine mile track. The cars dropped their product down a chute to barges waiting on the canal. Mules, riding in a special car behind the coal, then hauled the empties back up the track. Over the decades, the design incorporated more tracks, more cars, and employed locomotives. In time, the coal was loaded onto railroad cars as well as barges. But it likely that Hubbard saw the line in its early, primitive form.³⁰²

Leveraging their wealth and legislative connections, Benjamin Sherrod, David Hubbard and other influential planters, resolved to build such a railroad to move cotton to market. On January 16, 1830, the Alabama legislature authorized the formation of a corporation to build a railway the two miles from Tuscumbia to the landing on the Tennessee River. The stockholders elected a board of directors with Micajah Tarver of Tuscumbia as President.³⁰³ Negotiating away some right of way delays, work began in June 1831, the same year as work began on the Muscle Shoals Canal. The railway's completion was celebrated on June 1832.³⁰⁴ The horse-drawn railway, moving people, cotton, and other goods to and from the dock at the Tuscumbia landing was in operation.

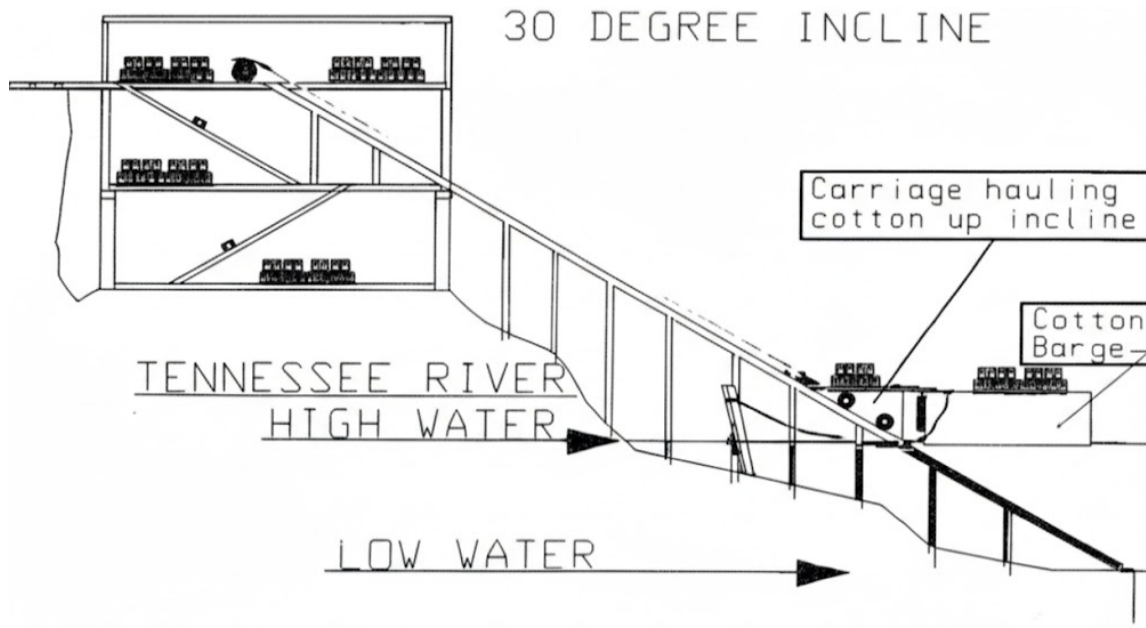
³⁰¹ "Colonel Benjamin Sherrod," WikiTree. Online. <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Sherrod-193>. Last accessed September 22, 2024.

³⁰² Earl J. Heydinger, "Railroads of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company: Group IX," *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, April 1954 (Number 110), p. 59. Accessible via JSTOR, October 1, 2024; [Mauch Chunk and Vicinity: with a Description of the Famous Switch-Back Railroad](#). Mauch Chunk: Boyle, Reed and Gihon, 1872. 79 pages. Public Domain, Hathi Trust.

³⁰³ Marty King, Lamar Marshall, and Larry Smith. [North Alabama's Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and Its Role During Cherokee Removal Beginning in 1837](#). Gail King, Project Director. Muscle Shoals, Alabama: Southeastern Anthropological Institute, Northwest Shoals Community College, 2009, p. 12.

³⁰⁴ Marty King, Lamar Marshall, Larry Smith. [North Alabama's Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and its Role During Cherokee Emigration/Removal Beginning in 1837](#). Gail King, Project Director. Southeastern Anthropological Institute, Northwest Shoals Community College, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 2009, p. 12.

The Tuscumbia railway mirrored the design of the Pennsylvania railroad, with wooden cedar sleepers or crossties. Instead of iron track, the



builders employed rails of oak atop of which were nailed half-inch thick ribbons of iron, some of which was manufactured in a new foundry in nearby

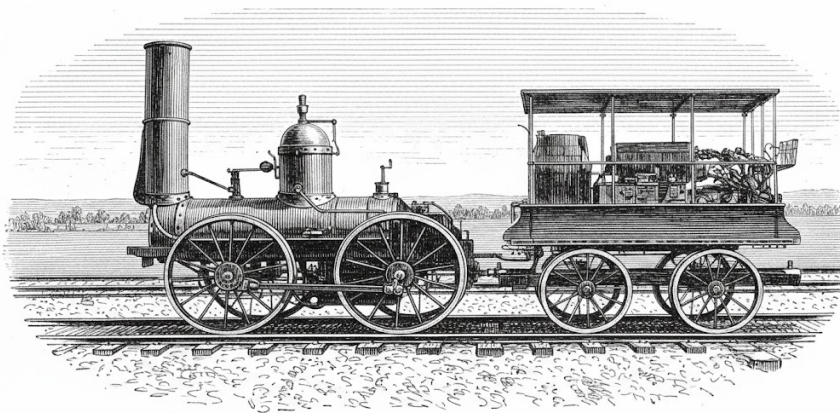
31 Tuscumbia Warehouse 1833

Russellville. The Tuscumbia railway would quickly become part of a larger charter, and during its separate existence, it functioned as a horsedrawn railway, with one or two horses, in line between the rails, pulling cars loaded with passengers and freight between Tuscumbia and the new river landing. The depot, about 14,000 square feet, featured three floors for the shipment of cotton and receiving of other goods via an inclined plane from steamships and keelboats moored to a floating pier.³⁰⁵

With proof of concept in place with their two-mile connection from Tuscumbia to the port, the planners and planters then moved to tackle the main problem, the efficient movement of plantation cotton grown on the south side of the river between Decatur and Tuscumbia, surmounting the shoals

³⁰⁵ [Letter, David Deshler, Chief Engineer, Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad to the Editor of the American Railroad Journal](#), in *American Railroad Journal and Advocate of Internal Improvements* III, no. 39 (October 4, 1834), p. 610 Online version in Google Books, accessed April 8, 2011: Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999.

bottleneck. The planters incorporated the 43-mile Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur railroad October 1831, and received the charter in January, 1832. \$300,000 in stock was subscribed, and construction began in March 1832 on the initial Tuscumbia – Leighton leg. The entire 43 mile run was completed to Decatur in December 1834.³⁰⁶ The board named David Deshler as chief engineer.³⁰⁷ At that time, the TC&D had 30 flatcars in operation to move cotton from the various depots to Tuscumbia Landing. The redoubtable Fulton engine was the initial workhorse for the line, with others



32 English-built "Planet"-type locomotive, representative of the engine supplied to Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad 1832

on order from the Stephenson Shops in England. Other cars were being prepared at a local foundry.³⁰⁸

Importantly, in January 1832, the Alabama Legislature approved the construction of a bridge between Florence and Tuscumbia, to allow further access to the expanded rail line in the future. A toll bridge, it was to service both rail and carriage traffic across the river.³⁰⁹ The eight-span bridge did not initially provide rail traffic across the river. The first rail service likely did not occur until 1860 when the wind-damaged bridge was replaced by a Memphis

³⁰⁶ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999.

³⁰⁷ Jack Daniel, ed. [Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System](#). Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, p. 5.

³⁰⁸ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935 p. 92.

³⁰⁹ Hugh Dudley. "[Chase Station: Preservation on Track!](#)", *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 20, 1995), p. 7 (citing *American Railroad Journal*, December 31, 1836).

and Charleston Railroad structure featuring rail service.³¹⁰ From that time, two trains were making daily connections between Florence and the Tuscumbia depot.³¹¹

In the long run, the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur was not sustainable as a planter's railroad. The lightweight design of the rails (strained under the heavy load of steam locomotives), the lack of equipment for maintenance and replacement of rails and steam technology in the Tennessee Valley had its impact.³¹² The cyclical nature of the cotton harvest likewise impacted the fiscal viability of the railroad. There was not enough traffic to meet the costs of operation. Historians, in retrospect, have pondered the entrepreneurial disinterest of the planters in exploring the desirability of extending the railroad to the sources of iron ore, limestone, and coal in the nearby region, fostering the emergence of the iron and steel industry earlier in Alabama history, and thus strengthening the economic health of the TC & D.³¹³ The cotton monoculture held sway.

The fiscal panic of 1837 disrupted planter efforts, particularly Sherrod's and Hubbard's, to sustain the railroad as envisioned. In that year, the powerful steamboat company, Sommerville, Reese and Company, fueled in part by the failure of the Muscle Shoals canal, leased all the assets of the wobbling TC&D, including the warehouses at both ends of the line. Subsequently Sommerville and Reese secured the mail contract between Tuscumbia and Knoxville. Their steamers ran the river, linking Knoxville, Chattanooga, Decatur and Tuscumbia, monopolizing the freight and passenger traffic on the Tennessee to New Orleans and return.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times.*](#) Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 80.

³¹¹ Jack Daniel, ed. [*Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System.*](#) Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, p. 20.

³¹² Jack Daniel, ed. [*Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System.*](#) Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, pp. 1-6.

³¹³ [*Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama: Historical and Biographical.*](#) Birmingham: Teeple and Smith, 1887, p. 121; Ethel Armes. [*The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama.*](#) New York: Arno Press, 1973, pp. 36-38; Jack Daniel, ed. [*Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System.*](#) Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, pp. 6-8.

³¹⁴ Jack Daniel, ed. [*Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System.*](#) Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, p. 9; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert*](#)

Ownership again changed hands a decade later, when the old planter clique reacquired the railroad from Sommerville and Reese. The Tuscumbia landing warehouse, depots at Tuscumbia, Courtland, Leighton, and Decatur, 91 flatcars, two passenger cars and five locomotives were the primary assets at the time of re-acquisition in 1848.³¹⁵ By now, the planters were adamant about the need to curb costs. The lengthy float up the northern loop of the Tennessee River to the Ohio and then down the Mississippi to New Orleans added to planter time and costs. What if the “iron river” could reduce the distance, dropping the cotton off at Memphis for a shorter haul to New Orleans, or shipping eastward, to the ports of Charleston or Savannah, as an alternative?³¹⁶

In June, 1852, the iron river reality began to emerge as the Tennessee Valley Railroad was delivered in whole to the Memphis and Charleston, ceasing to exist as a separate entity.³¹⁷ The leaders of Florence and Huntsville vigorously argued for a Memphis – Charleston line on the north side of the river, but in the end economic considerations dictated that the graded right of way of the TC&D south of the river was the better way to proceed. Bending to pressures, the powers behind the Memphis and Charleston project-- [Edmund Pendleton Gaines](#), Memphis Mayor [Marcus Winchester](#) and others -- agreed to divert across the river at Decatur, with a new line linking to Huntsville and thence via access to leased lines to Charleston. The first train of cars crossed the river at Decatur, bound for Huntsville, May 23, 1855.³¹⁸

[County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 94.

³¹⁵ Jack Daniel, ed. [Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System](#). Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, p. 11; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 95; Hugh Dudley. “[Chase Station: Preservation on Track!](#),” *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 20, 1995), p. 22.

³¹⁶ Jack Daniel, ed. [Southern Railway: From Stevenson to Memphis. A History of the Memphis Division, Southern Railway System](#). Germantown, TN: Grandmother Earth Creations, 1996, p. 11; Linda Bayer. “The [Memphis and Charleston: The Railroad Comes to Huntsville](#),” *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3 Article 1, p. 4

³¹⁷ “[The Tennessee Valley Railroad](#),” *The American Railroad Journal*. Saturday, July 31, 1852, p. 490. (A one-page summary of the life of the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur is available on the page of *The Journal*).

³¹⁸ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862](#)

The M&C railway was finally completed in March 27, 1857, with the linkage of the eastern and western portions of the line linked ceremoniously at Iuka, Mississippi. A barrel of water from the Mississippi, freighted to Charleston, was poured into the Atlantic Ocean to celebrate the accomplishment.³¹⁹ In his diary, David Deshler exulted in accomplishment:

*March 27, 1857. The last rail laid. Memphis and Charleston united. It is now over a quarter of a century since the inception of the project. The great work is now accomplished and our favored Tennessee Valley is fairly unlocked so that we have free and speedy access to the South Atlantic seaports on the one hand and to the "Father of Waters" on the other.*³²⁰

On April 1, it was possible to travel on the M&CR from Memphis to Stevenson, Alabama, from there linking with the Nashville & Chattanooga line with connections to Charleston or Savannah. The trains averaged some 18 miles per hour on the five-day, 780-mile route.³²¹ In his diary of May 18, 1858, Thomas Hobbs noted the first cars running northward on the Tennessee and Virginia line, commenting proudly that there were 200 passengers on the evening train from Memphis, with 39 through-ticketed to New York.³²²

And while the new railway was a technological innovation that moved goods at a much lower price and sped commerce and travelers along at a pace heretofore unexperienced, everyone did not benefit equally. The planters, doubtlessly, reduced their costs, and became wealthier. The crushing institution of slavery was more deeply ensconced. Yet, trains, racing to newly emerging distribution centers in Memphis, Charleston, Savannah and elsewhere, no longer stopped in many towns. Tuscumbia Landing, for one,

[*When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 130, 163, 166.

³¹⁹ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times.*](#) Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 95-97.

³²⁰ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times.*](#) Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 98.

³²¹ Hugh Dudley. [*"Chase Station: Preservation on Track!"*](#), *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 20, 1995), p. 4.

³²² [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 208.

was soon by-passed and later abandoned. Steamboat companies connected to the old landings went out of business.³²³ It would also change the Valley's alignment with New Orleans. "The New Orleans trade to Northern Alabama is almost entirely gone," wrote the *Commercial Bulletin*, and East Tennessee is rapidly going. But a short time ago all the cotton in the Tennessee Valley came to New Orleans". "[C]ompletion of the Memphis and Charleston will take from the commerce of New Orleans at least 300,000 bales of cotton" added the *Daily Delta*.³²⁴

The decision to run the Memphis and Charleston along the south side of the river, and the failure of the Muscle Shoals canal contributed in no small way to the unanticipated stagnation of Florence after 1840. The importance of a northern river link to Nashville, Pittsburgh and elsewhere went unrealized.³²⁵ During the course of the life of La Grange College, the railroads of Alabama and the Tennessee Valley would slowly expand. The people of the Tennessee Valley would work to cobble together rail lines, roads, and steamboats on both sides of the shoals to expand the economy as best their river would allow.

The Roads. The United States, after the ouster of foreign competition pushed its influence westward along commerce-bearing roadways: the [National Road](#) into Ohio and Indiana and the [Wilderness Road](#) from Virginia, through the Cumberland Gap, to Kentucky. Other routes began connecting the Watauga settlement on the Holston and leading the Georgia and Carolina populations to Tennessee at Knoxville. But access from the Muscle Shoals area of the Tennessee Valley west to Natchez and St. Stephens was through a vast swath of Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw territory. Westward and southern travel was an arduous trek overland, initially following timeless indigenous paths and trails slowly widened and improved for packhorse travel and later for wagons and similar coach. As the roads were

³²³ N. P. Renfro. [The Beginning of Railroads in Alabama](#). Auburn, Alabama: Alabama Polytechnic Historic Studies. George Petrie, Ed. Fourth Series, p. 17; A. H. Keller, "Tuscumbia", A. Davis Smith and T. A. DeLand, [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Birmingham: Smith & Deland, 1888, p.427.

³²⁴ Johnson, Walter. [River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 319.

³²⁵ A. H. Keller, "Tuscumbia", A. Davis Smith and T. A. DeLand, [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Birmingham: Smith & Deland, 1888, p. 289.

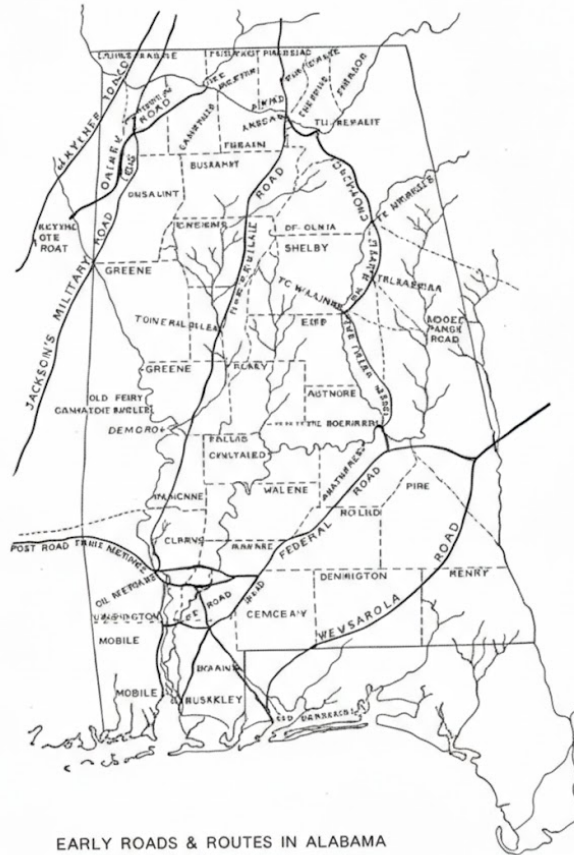
established and improved, immigrants overflowed the tribal lands, overwhelming them and ultimately leading to their eviction.³²⁶

As the threat of violence between settlers and the native peoples

ebbed, and as the first vestiges of law, education, and order began to appear in northern Alabama, the steady flow of migration swelled. It was possible to travel from Philadelphia overland to Pittsburgh and from there to Wheeling and Zanesville, down the Kentucky Trace to Lexington, and from there pick up the Natchez Trace down to Colbert's Landing near Muscle Shoals. In this manner, Alabama was opened to settlers from the entire Ohio Valley – a people who perhaps brought somewhat different values and views than the influx of migrants from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia.³²⁷

The early roads as they

evolved from horse paths opened the region for settlement and economic development. Some would connect the Tennessee Valley with the Tombigbee area; others would link the Tennessee River with the Coosa. The road built



33 Early Roads and Routes in Alabama

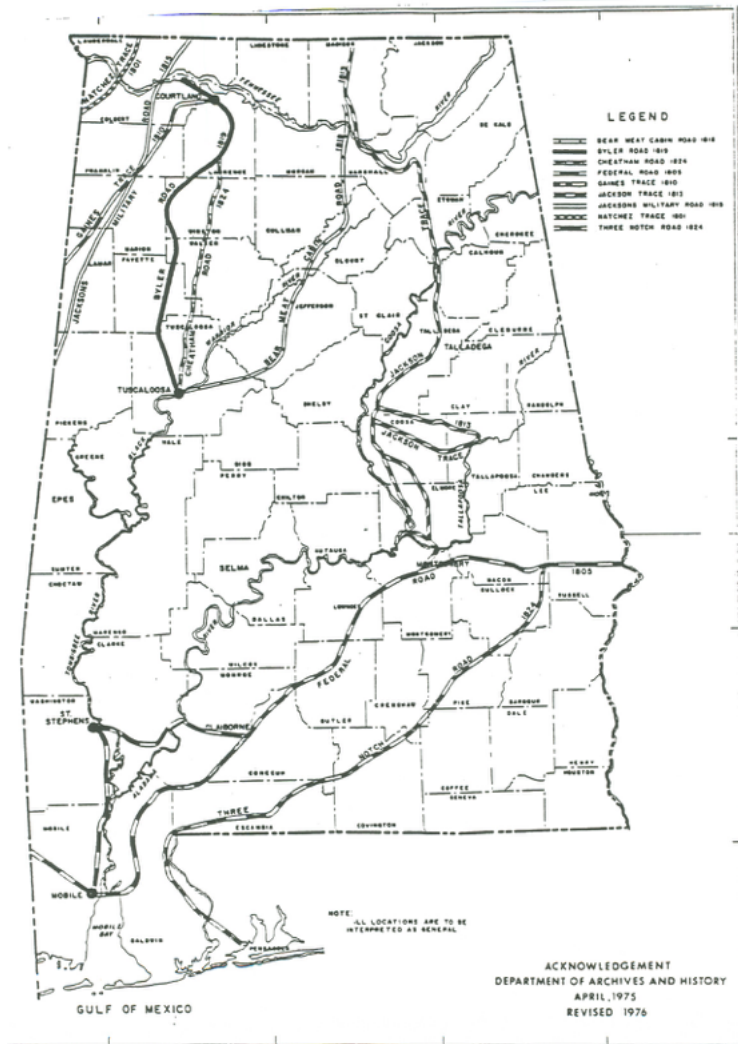
³²⁶ P. J. Hamilton. [Early Roads of Alabama](#). *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898, pp. 35-36.

³²⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893. Available online Google Books, p. 67.

from Huntsville to Tuscaloosa became the primary connector between the north and south regions of the state.³²⁸

Natchez Trace. The most important early track was the [Natchez Trace](#). A bridle path ran through the Chickasaw and other tribal lands stretching some 500 miles on a northeast to southwest diagonal, crossing the

Tennessee River at Bear Creek. It was used by early French and English traders for centuries. From 1797 government carriers packed the mail over the trail between Nashville and Natchez. Pioneer settlers and traders who moved their goods to market by flatboat and keelboat to either Natchez or New Orleans, would sell their goods as well as their boat's timber, and make their way back overland on the crude trail from Natchez to Nashville and points beyond. Not until 1801 did U. S. Army engineers begin the process of widening the trace sufficiently to accommodate wagons and better mail service to Natchez. [General James](#)



34 Natchez Trace

Route enabled by the Treaty with the Chickasaw (July 23, 1805; 7 Stat. 80)

Wilkinson and U. S. Commissioners [Benjamin Hawkins](#) and [James Pickens](#) were instrumental in negotiating permissions with the Chickasaw and

³²⁸ Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 294. For an introduction to Alabama's frontier roads, see the undated online study, [Introduction to Alabama's Early Roads](#). Last accessed 11 September 2024.

Choctaw.³²⁹ Article II of the [1801 treaty](#) extended the route of the Natchez Trace south through Choctaw lands from Natchez to New Orleans.³³⁰ Opened in 1803 as a post road, the Trace played a vital role in the movement of people, troops, mail, and commerce into the region. Over its distance, the trace passed through about thirty miles of Alabama in Lauderdale and Colbert counties.³³¹ There, under the terms of the 1801 treaty, the [Colberts](#) operated their ferry across the Tennessee River and stands for travelers on the Trace until shortly before George's departure for Oklahoma.³³² The tribal inns were among the first available respites for travelers along the rough roads of the southeast.

Except on main roads in settled areas where stagecoaches might carry the mail during dry season, the mail was usually carried by a horseback rider. John Lee Swaney, nephew of Richard Henry Lee, was a mail carrier on the Natchez Trace from 1896 to 1804 or so. His route from Nashville to Natchez took 10 days on horseback and required one night of bivouac in the woods. Three weeks were consumed in the round trip. Riding a large black horse, he carried a half bushel of corn, an overcoat, blanket, and trumpet as well as his own rations, a flint, and tinderbox. He always spent one night at George Colbert's inn. Along the Trace the tribes were friendly and the highwaymen left the rider alone as he carried no money. Travelers would often join him enroute for protection.³³³

³²⁹ P. J. Hamilton. [Early Roads of Alabama](#). *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*. V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898, p. 36; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 22.

³³⁰ Seymour Dunbar. *A History of Travel in America*. Indianapolis: The Bobb's Merrill Company. Vol. 2. 1915.

³³¹ "[Natchez Trace](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online Edition ©2008. Hosted by Auburn University. <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2037>

³³² Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999; Jill Knight Garrett. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 26; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County, 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 22.

³³³ Wyatt F. Jeltz. "[The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians](#)". *Journal of Negro History*. 33, 1 (January 1948), p. 25; Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 295.

The Federal Road. Far to the south of the Tennessee Valley settlements, the Federal Road connecting Georgia with St. Stephens had its origins in 1805, with a treaty between the U.S. and Creeks creating a horse path through the latter's lands.³³⁴ The Creeks, the avaricious William McIntosh among them, agreed to maintain ferries along the road and lodging houses, stands, at prices set by the government. McIntosh himself built and maintained a ferry across the Chattahoochee River.³³⁵ By 1811 the road had been widened into "Three Chopped Way". Though a rough road, wheeled traffic became possible on the former horse path. The road entered Alabama at Fort Mitchell, near present day Phenix City, and through Montgomery, Fort Deposit, and Burnt Corn before crossing the Alabama River at Weatherford's Ferry below Fort Claiborne, then across the Tombigbee up to St. Stephens and on to Natchez. A southern branch extended from Burnt Corn, crossing Mims' Ferry on the Alabama, and reaching to Fort Stoddard. In 1812, one traveler reported carriages from Savannah, Georgia in Fort Stoddard. Substandard roadbeds plagued the road throughout early statehood, and as late as 1835 the mail often was carried by horseback. When running, the stagecoaches carried mail and passengers, changing horses at relay stations twelve to fifteen miles apart, averaging about five miles an hour.³³⁶

Gaines Trace. The construction of the Gaines Trace partly rectified a problem extending back to the Peace of Paris, when the Spanish regained control of Mobile and upriver erected a stiff tariff barrier that restricted the flow of commerce up and down the Alabama waterway. For the most part, the tariffs were so high, settlers above Spanish West Florida could not afford to trade with Mobile. For example, a barrel of flour that cost \$4 in Natchez could bear a \$16 price once it passed the tariff barrier. With tribal chiefs, the United States negotiated a treaty allowing a horse path with a load limit of 200 pounds

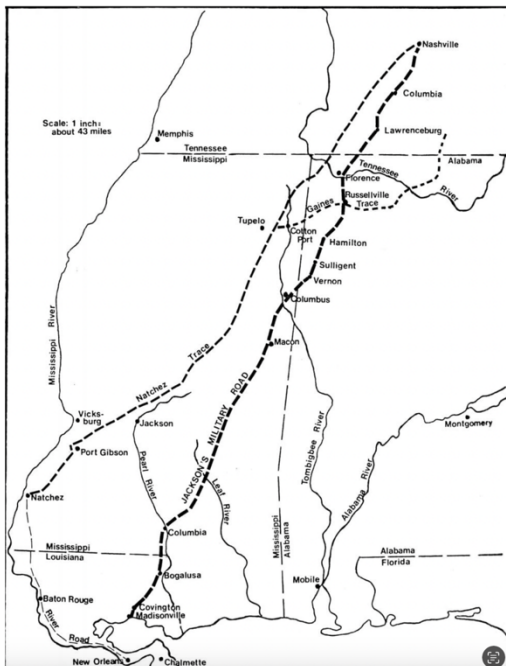
³³⁴ P. J. Hamilton. *Early Roads of Alabama. Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society.* V. II Thomas McAdory Owen. Tuscaloosa AL: Alabama Historical Society. 1898, p. 37.

³³⁵ Albert Burton Moore. *History of Alabama and Her People.* In 3 volumes. Vol. 1, The American Historical Society, 1927, p. 97; Peter Cozzens. *A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 82-86.

³³⁶ Albert Burton Moore, *History of Alabama.* Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1911, pp. 67-68; Albert Burton Moore, *History of Alabama.* Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 295.. For an in depth study of the Old Federal Road see Kathryn H. Braund, Gregory A. Waselkov, and Raven M. Christopher. *The Old Federal Road in Alabama: An Illustrated Guide.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019; *The Very Worst Road: Travelers Accounts of Crossing Alabama's Old Creek Territory, 1820-1847.* Jeffrey C. Benton, Compiler. Historic Chattahoochee Commission, 2009.

to run from Cotton Gin Port on the Tombigbee to the Tennessee River at Courtland. Under the direction of Fort Stoddert commandant Edmund P. Gaines, the military opened the route in 1805. Goods could be shipped to the Shoals region, and carried overland about seventy miles to Cotton Gin Port, where they could be again transferred and floated from there to St. Stephens. Among the early settlers to brave the trace was a five-wagon train led in 1816 by the Reverend Frederick Weaver. The families trekked from Laurens, South Carolina to Bedford, Tennessee and to Russellville, and Cotton Gin Port to their new homes and new land holds in Mississippi. The Gaines Trace played

an important role in the early development of the south Alabama frontier.³³⁷



35 Jackson Military Road

Jackson's Military Road. The construction of the military road, connecting Nashville and New Orleans was key to the opening of northwest Alabama for settlement and development. The challenges of recent years, the War of 1812, and the crushing defeat of the Creeks in 1813-1814, persuaded General Jackson of the need for better roads in the southern part of the United States. President James Monroe in 1816 convinced Congress to fund the road for military movement, economic development, and settlement. On

September 16, Congress appropriated \$5,000 toward the construction of Jackson's Military Road.³³⁸

³³⁷ Nina Leftwich. 1850: *Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times*. Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935 p. 26; [Introduction to Alabama's Early Roads](#) Last accessed 11 September 2024; ["The First Wagon Train – Monroe County"](#) *West Alabama History*. Last accessed September 12, 2024.

³³⁸ For an in-depth study of the road, see Dustin Mitchell Wren, [Through the Wilderness: Andrew Jackson's Military Road and the Settlement of the Southern Frontier](#). Master's Thesis. Missouri State University, 2021. <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3597>; ["Jackson's Military Road,"](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online Edition. Last accessed September 11, 2024.

However, the Chickasaw and Cherokee controlled much of the land through which the roadway must pass. To obtain permissions and move forward, Jackson assembled Chickasaw, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek representatives at Colbert's ferry. By September 20, 1816, the necessary cessions had been obtained, and in the process not only was road right of way obtained, but most of northwest Alabama was opened for settlement. It was in the aftermath of this accomplishment that Jackson, Coffee, and the other investors created their Cypress Land Company, and the towns of Florence, Tuscumbia and Russellville to the south began to emerge.³³⁹

Survey of the roadway began in the fall of 1816, with [Major William O. Butler](#) and [Captain Hugh Young](#) handling the grueling task of conquering forests, swamps, and canebrakes. Army infantry troops under the direction of [Colonel Duncan Clinch](#) began work on the road in 1817, completing their 515-mile chore in May 1820. The road ranged in width from 25 to 40 feet with 35 bridges and 20,000 feet of causeway constructed of timber covered with turf, hardly a durable technique.³⁴⁰ The route from Nashville to New Orleans had been shortened by over 200 miles.

Yet despite the marvels of its construction through a formidable wilderness, and despite its facilitation of movement of settlers into and through the land, Jackson's Military Road never achieved the promise envisioned by many. Inadequate funds were available for its maintenance. While reasonably sustained in populated areas, little attention was given the roadway where it passed through remaining tribal lands and other uninhabited spaces. Neglect left it vulnerable to the forces of nature. Never fully cleared of stumps, the roadway was reclaimed by forest growth in many areas; treefalls blocked passage in others; storms swept away bridges and eroded causeways. Because of deteriorating conditions, the U. S. Postal Service only briefly used Jackson's Military Road to move mail between Nashville and New Orleans. A report to the office of the Post-Master General in 1825 reported that the roadway was "so out of repair as to render the regular transportation

³³⁹ "[Jackson's Military Road](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online Edition. Last accessed September 11, 2024; "[Jackson's Military Road](#)," *Wikipedia*. Last accessed September 12, 2024; Harry E. Wallace. *History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*. A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999- and accessible via Rootsweb (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~allauder/historyshoals1.htm>) and housed by author in Instapaper

³⁴⁰ "[Jackson's Military Road](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online Edition. Last accessed September 11, 2024; "[Jackson's Military Road](#)," *Wikipedia*. Last accessed September 12, 2024.

of mail impracticable. The bridges and causeways have fallen into decay, and, in many parts, the entire space opened for the road has become filled with young growths of timber.” A year later, a contract was issued to move mail between Washington, D. C., and New Orleans via the Federal Road.³⁴¹ Further, after Jackson’s ascendancy to the presidency in 1829, he made no efforts to direct fund to its maintenance. Continued neglect hastened its disuse.³⁴²

Byler Turnpike. In its first session, the Alabama legislature turned its attention to the need for better roadways to facilitate settlement and economic development. On December 16, 1819, Governor William Wyatt Bibb approved legislation for Alabama’s first turnpike. Having its beginning at the head of Jackson’s Military Road in Tennessee, the road was to cross the Tennessee at Big Shoal Creek and make its way to Madisonville, Louisiana. Established as a turnpike, tolls were to fund its construction. Its construction was to facilitate initially the movement of people and commerce between Nashville and the soon-to-be Alabama capital of Tuscaloosa. Private investors funded much of the cost of the turnpike. When the route to Tuscaloosa was completed, tolls of one dollar for were charged for a four-wheeled carriage to travel the entire route. Tolls were collected as well for two-wheeled conveyances, horseback riders, and livestock. The road took its name for [John Byler](#), one of the corporate contractors responsible for its construction. The roadway was a crude one, but twelve feet wide, cleared of stumps and roots. Taking to high ground and ridges where possible, causeways constructed over over boggy stretches ³⁴³ When Tuscaloosa became the capital in 1826, a Tennessee Valley senator proclaimed the Byler

³⁴¹ Dustin Mitchell Wren, [Through the Wilderness: Andrew Jackson’s Military Road and the Settlement of the Southern Frontier](#). Master’s Thesis. Missouri State University, 2021. <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3597>, p. 60.

³⁴² “[Jackson’s Military Road](#),” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online Edition. Last accessed September 11, 2024; Jackson’s Military Road,” *Wikipedia*. Last accessed September 12, 2024; Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999. Online. Accessed February 25, 2026

³⁴³ Marie Bankhead Owen. [The Story of Alabama: A History of the State](#). New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1949. Vol. II, pp. 256-259; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tusculumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935 p. 41; Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 19 51, p. 297.

Turnpike to be the “Main Street of Northwest Alabama.”³⁴⁴ Portions of the roadway still exist under contemporary highways in western Alabama.

The early Alabama roads were crude but essential and their role in the support of commerce was abetted by the state’s marvelous system of waterways. One example will suffice to demonstrate their role in the cotton economy of Alabama. Whether ginned on a plantation on the owner’s equipment, or on cotton gins run by mercantilists, the cotton, once baled, had to be moved to market. For plantation owners above the head of navigation on the Tennessee, or farmers in the hill country or the Coosa Valley, the baled cotton had, somehow, to make its way to Mobile or New Orleans. The old Huntsville road served the Jones Valley en route to Tuscaloosa, where bales were loaded onto steamboats, or towed on keelboats and flatboats down the Black Warrior and Tombigbee to Mobile. Otherwise the keelboats loaded above the Muscle Shoals waters and in high water rode the floodtide to Florence and Tuscumbia, to be aggregated for the long trip to New Orleans. Rather than sold to factors, sometimes the bales were bartered for goods with town merchants, the transport wagons making their way back home with the dry goods for another year: seed corn, flour, coffee, sugar and home goods for the farm family.³⁴⁵

Even at their best, the roads were little more than horse paths. As with the Byler Turnpike, the roadways kept to high ground where possible. Earthen causeways constructed over timbers proved to be short-term solution to traversing swampland. Always rough, they were often impassible in wet seasons. Covering the rugged terrain, carriages would average about two and a half miles per hour.³⁴⁶ The Federal Road between Montgomery and Columbus, for example, could require four days to travel, over ground one traveler report was so rugged it was preferable to walk alongside the coach rather than jostle around inside.³⁴⁷ That Federal Road is the same one that in 1826 the U. S. Postal Service directed carriers to use in preference to Jackson’s Military Road to deliver mail to and from New Orleans.

The deplorable conditions of the roads meant that in the early nineteenth century commerce and travel was largely conducted by water, and

³⁴⁴ [Introduction to Alabama’s Early Roads](#). Last accessed 11 September 2024.

³⁴⁵ Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 277.

³⁴⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted. [A Journey in the Back Country](#). Vol. III. *Our Slave States*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1860, p. 125.

³⁴⁷ Albert Burton Moore, [History of Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: Alabama Bookstore, 1951, p. 294.

the largest cities were seaports or river cities such as Cincinnati and St. Louis. To reach Cincinnati from New York took 19 days in 1817, requiring a difficult trip over the Appalachians.³⁴⁸ So inferior were the roadways that to transport a ton of goods thirty miles by oxcart would cost thirty dollars; for the same price those goods could be transported three thousand miles by sail.³⁴⁹

Yet, as bad as they were, the roads remained the primary means of transportation in the sparsely populated and far-flung region of the Tennessee Valley. In the 1840s, a stage line ran between Florence and Savannah operated by Chaffin. & Gullett; three days a week, Tom Douglas & Company connecting Florence and Nashville. A passenger and mail coach connected Columbia, Tennessee to Tusculum.³⁵⁰ As late as 1856, the roads connecting the north and south were so bad that Thomas Hobbs left a legislative session and traveled from Montgomery to Atlanta by train, thence to Chattanooga, from whence he took the steamboat to Decatur, a two and half day journey.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ David Walker Howe. [*What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848.*](#) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 41.

³⁴⁹ David Walker Howe. [*What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848.*](#) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 40.

³⁵⁰ Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\).*](#) Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 22.

³⁵¹ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 188.

Chapter 3

Social Impact of the Cotton Monoculture: Expropriation and Extirpation

The Rise of the Cotton Monoculture

With the ouster of the foreign powers in the American southeast, and the corresponding loosened grip of the indigenous tribes on their lands, the steady trek of the Anglo-American colonists began. At the same time, there were global economic developments that would turn the migratory trickle into a torrent. Industrial innovations in textile producing and cotton ginning, combined with similar advances in transportation and supply chain, enabled the emergence of a cotton kingdom in the lands of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Those economic developments would spell the end of the native tribes in their homeland, and ensure the shackling of millions of enslaved Africans to the plantations of Southern planters. This chapter will treat the emergence of the global cotton economy, the cotton empire in the American South, the wholesale deportaton of a native people, and socially unjust subjugation and maltreatment of millions of black enslaved people – a conditon which, in time, the Southern church would lend its support.

The Global Cotton Economy. By the time the Mississippi Territory was established in 1798, the global cotton textile revolution had been underway for more than three quarters of a century. The global market originated in India, where fine cotton textiles were produced and sold in an Asian market. Cheaper than wool, and capable of being printed and dyed in bright colors, they became enormously popuar in England. Government protectionism, in the form of high tariffs enacted in the 1730s, enabled a mature wool and linen textile industry there to mature into production of the new fabric. Behind the protectionist wall, a series of inventions rapidly propelled the British cotton textile industry into world domination.³⁵² By 1850,

³⁵² Peter Stearns. [*The Industrial Revolution in World History*](#). New York: Routledge, 2020. 5th Edition, p. 45. For a summary of the British inventions: flying shuttle, spinning jenny, water frame

the value of the British cotton textile industry would exceed that of the woolen textiles by fifty percent. Wool had been the dominant industry on the island for over four centuries. As one writer has observed, the Industrial Revolution in England was predominantly an 18th century revolution in the production of cotton textiles.³⁵³

Needed, however, was a reliable source of cotton to feed the voracious machines of the British textile factories. Mid-17th century there were neither regions of the world, or trade ports, that featured cotton as a primary export. About a quarter of the fiber made its way from the Ottoman empire; some made its way from India, with the islands of the West Indies growing in importance in the latter decades of the 17th century. As late as 1790, the cotton feeding the increasingly mechanized factories of the world still came from small farmers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The challenge for British manufacturers was to secure yet more predictable and inexpensive sources of cotton fiber for its looms.³⁵⁴

England looked first to the West Indies – St. Croix, Jamaica, Grenada, Dominica, and Barbados and Saint-Dominique – from where imports would increase sharply in the last decades of the 18th century. With the turn toward the dependence on the West Indies, the global cotton empire also embraced slavery as its foundation. Guyana and Brazil built cotton plantations on the backs of the enslaved. By 1792, Brazil overtook the Ottoman Empire in the volume of cotton shipments to England. Indeed, of all the enslaved Africans brought to the Americas after 1492, almost half arrived between 1780 and 1888.³⁵⁵

Cotton comes to the U.S. In 1780 no cotton was imported into England from North America. However, the new American planter class was not unaware of the demand for cotton, the price it commanded in the marketplace, and the opportunity it represented. In 1785, an American vessel berthed at Liverpool. In its hold, along with tobacco, indigo, rice and other

and spinning mule, etc., see Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, pp. 65-67.

³⁵³ Inikori, Joseph E. "Slavery and the Revolution in Cotton Textile Production in England," Chapter 6 in Inikori, Joseph E; Engerman Stanley L., Editors. [*Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*](#). Durham: Duke University Press, 1992, p. 146.

³⁵⁴ Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, pp. 41, 81, 84.

³⁵⁵ Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, pp. 88-94.

commodities were a number of bags of cotton, immediately impounded by customs officials who declared it impossible for the cotton to have been grown in the U. S.³⁵⁶ The cotton uptake was slow in the United States. With its tobacco plantations exhausting their soils, and rice production impacted by global pricing, southerners failed to see an emergent alternative crop, and in 1787 agreed to a constitutional compromise that prohibited the importation of slaves after 1808.³⁵⁷ But some appreciated the prospect. As early as 1786, James Madison predicted the United States would become a global player in cotton production, a prospect in which George Washington himself concurred.³⁵⁸ The production of cotton picked up, but slowly. In 1790, only one and a half million pounds of cotton were produced. As late as 1795, when Congress ratified the Jay Treaty which, among other things, revoked the right of American ships to transport West Indies cotton, the strategic importance of the fiber in the nation's economic future was not yet fully realized.³⁵⁹

In short order, unprecedented change would occur. A huge swath of the American south was perfectly suited to the cultivation of cotton – fertile soils, adequate rain and frostfree growing seasons. The presence of foreign powers and intrigue in the Southeast would vanish.³⁶⁰ The weakened indigenous tribes in the region would be relieved of millions of acres of arable land³⁶¹; technological and horticultural enhancements would make cotton a cash crop;³⁶² and the enslaved labor force essential for the exploitation of the commodity would be instantaneously made available through external and

³⁵⁶ Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, pp. 88-98.

³⁵⁷ Bailey, Ronald. "[The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States](#)". *Agricultural History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 35.

³⁵⁸ Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, p. 100.

³⁵⁹ Olmstead, Alan L., Rhode, Paul W. "[Cotton, Slavery and the New History of Capitalism.](#)" *Explorations in Economic History*. Elsevier. 2017; "The Slave Trade," [National Archives: Educator Resources](#), accessed December 11, 2024.

³⁶⁰ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, pp. 18 -34; Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, p. 100.

³⁶¹ Young, Mary E. "[Indian Removal and Land Allotment: The Civilized Tribes and Jacksonian Justice.](#)" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (October 1958), pp. 31 – 45

³⁶² Coclanis, Peter A. [Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America \(review\)](#). *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (October 2004), pp. 834-835; Aiken, Charles. "[The Evolution of Cotton Ginning in the Southeastern United States](#)". *Geographical Review*, Vol. 63, NO. 1 (April 1973), pp. 196-224; Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, p. 102.

internal trade in human chattel.³⁶³ Within ten years after the introduction of the mechanized cotton gin (1793) and the adoption of short staple cotton, 35 million pounds of cotton were marketed, zooming to 331 million pounds by 1830.³⁶⁴

In the South Carolina upcountry, successful use of Whitney's gin and the planting of short staple cotton created new enthusiasm among Carolina and Georgia planters, who cast an envious eye upon the fertile lands of the Great Bend and the Tennessee River Valley. Federal policy still recognized native control of the lands in the Valley, but it did not stop a steady flow of squatters effecting their own arrangements with local tribes to clear



36 Nations of the Southeastern United States on the Eve of Removal 1830

and settle their own farmholds. Before long, government policy and power would change to address and accommodate the pressures of small farmers and big planters alike. In the words of historian Daniel Dupre, the closing of the Alabama frontier would lie at the intersection of war upon the southern tribes, migration of a torrent of settlers, a cotton monoculture, and federal land policy.³⁶⁵ While most cotton was exported for textile manufacture in England or northern U. S. states, there was some production in the Valley. By 1840, the Globe factory near Florence, Alabama employed some 150 people in cotton fabric production.³⁶⁶

Indigenous Policy at the Birth of the Nation.

Historically, the economic relationship between the native Alabama people and the European imperial powers was characterized by

³⁶³ Sellers, James Benson. [Slavery in Alabama](#). University of Alabama Press, 1994.

³⁶⁴ Bailey, Ronald. "[The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States](#)". *Agricultural History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 35.

³⁶⁵ Daniel S. Dupre. [Alabama's Frontiers and the Rise of the Old South. A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier](#). Malcolm Rohrbough and Walter Nugent, editors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018, pp. 188, 252.

³⁶⁶ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 21.

restive transactionalism. An extractive trade for deerskin, fur, beeswax, timber, pitch and the like -- with no serious efforts to assimilate or restrict movement largely defined Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee relations with the French, Spanish and British during their forays into the Alabama territory. The triumph of the former colonists in their war of revolution brought change. The new nation, powerful and populous, irrepressibly advanced from their east coast origins. Immigration swelled the American population; the thirst for land was insatiable.

When founded in 1798, the Mississippi Territory—soon to become the slave states of Mississippi and Alabama—was home to some 15,000 Creek, 11,500 Choctaw, and 2,500 Chickasaw, as well as a substantial number of Cherokee in the Tennessee Valley and eastern Alabama, perhaps 50,000 altogether. Concentrated in two enclaves around Natchez and along the banks of the lower Tombigbee were approximately 5,000 Euro-American settlers and 3,500 enslaved Africans. The tribal nations were thus not only the majority of the population; they held title, recognized in both Spanish and American treaty practice, to most of the lands within the territory.³⁶⁷ The tribal nations were not only the majority of the population; they held titles guaranteed by Spanish and American treaties to most of the land.

Historians have generally described the evolution of early United States Indian policy in the Southeast as proceeding through three overlapping phases: a *Federalist phase* associated with the administration of George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox (1789–1801); a Jeffersonian phase (1801–1812); and a later *Calhoun–Jacksonian* phase (1816–1830). During these decades federal policy exhibited diplomatic, economic, and military dimensions, employing treaty commissioners and Indian agents, licensed traders and government trading posts, and a system of forts and military roads to secure federal influence and facilitate expansion. An educational component was added following passage of the [Civilization Fund Act of 1819](#), which provided federal subsidies to denominational mission schools designed to encourage agricultural settlement and cultural assimilation among Native communities. Suffice it to say that Jefferson, Madison and Monroe were expansionists, eager to obtain

³⁶⁷ Daniel H. Usner, Jr. “[American Indians on the Cotton Frontier: Changing Economic Relations with Citizens and Slaves in the Mississippi Territory](#).” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (Sep. 1985), p. 298. The estimates of populations are his but are congruent with other sources; Saunt, Claudio. [A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816](#). New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

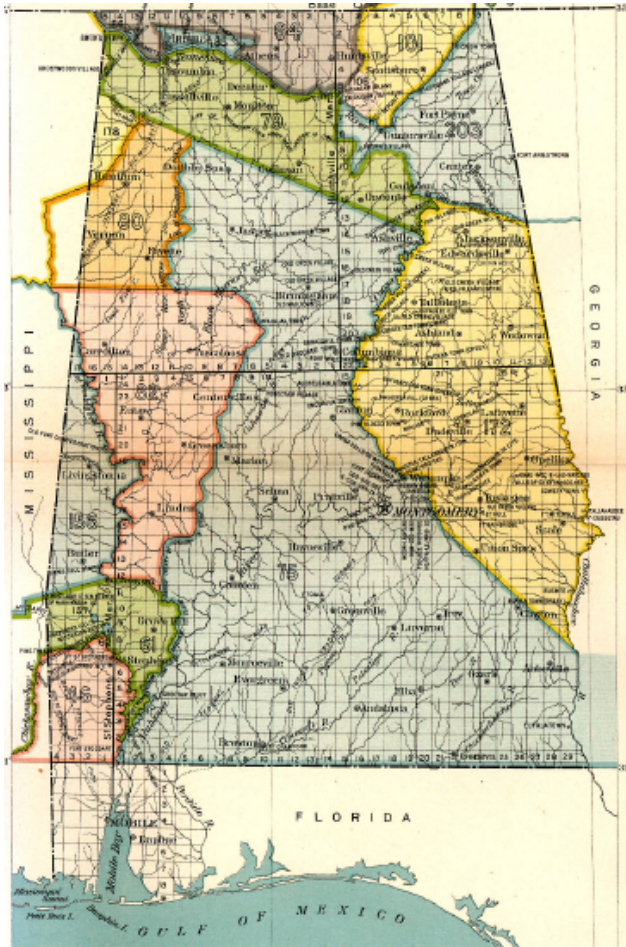
Spanish and native lands to fuel the growth of the new nation as quickly as possible. Jackson's years as president would add a more aggressive military element to policy.³⁶⁸

As federal policy evolved, the dispossession of the Southeastern tribes generally followed two distinct institutional paths. The Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee typically ceded their lands to the United States by treaty, after which Native title was extinguished and the lands surveyed under the township-range system and sold as part of the federal public domain through land offices at Nashville, St. Stephens, Huntsville, and elsewhere. In contrast, under the [Treaty of Cusseta \(1832\)](#), Creek lands in Alabama were divided into individually allotted reservations that could thereafter be sold by their Native occupants to private purchasers with federal approval. Much of the Creek land base thus passed into settler hands through direct transactions between individuals rather than through the federal land office system. This allotment-and-alienation model would in time become increasingly prominent, and after 1871 Congress abandoned treaty-making as the formal mechanism of Indian land acquisition, relying instead upon allotment statutes and negotiated agreements to transfer Native lands into private ownership.³⁶⁹

The Federalist Phase. Initially, the U. S. adhered to the possibility of gaining access to the indigenous lands through acculturation, an approach that George Washington and his Secretary of War, Henry Knox both advocated. Through instruction, tools and education, the tribes were encouraged to adopt the lifestyle and practices of the American yeoman farmer. Agriculture would provide stability and income, eliminating the need for vast hunting grounds. To promote domestication and to help forge better

³⁶⁸ Owsley, Frank L. and Smith, G. A. [Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997; Prucha, Francis Paul. [American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790–1834](#) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Ronald N. Satz, [American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era](#) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975; U.S. Statutes at Large, [“An Act Making Provision for the Civilization of the Indian Tribes Adjoining the Frontier Settlements,”](#) March 3, 1819, 3 Stat. 516

³⁶⁹ Michael D. Green, [The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis](#) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); U.S. Congress, [“Act of March 3, 1871,”](#) 25 U.S.C. § 71; Harmon, George Dewey. [Sixty Years of Indian Affairs: Political, Economic, and Diplomatic 1789-1850](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941, p. 199.



37 Indian Land Cessions in the Southeastern United States, Plate 1 (showing Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee cessions in Alabama and adjacent regions). From Charles C. Royce, "Indian Land Cessions in the United States," *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1896–1897* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899). Public domain

relations between the two cultures, trading posts, or factories, were established at President Washington's direction, as early as 1796, at strategic points such as St. Stephens in tribal lands. There, honey, deerskins, furs, beeswax, and others products (including cotton in the later years) were bartered for farm implements, axes, guns, and the like. The factors encouraged the chiefs and tribesmen to buy freely, even on credit, with resulting debts to be settled by land cessions. The tribes could be persuaded to cede the lands to the federal government at bargain rates, to be surveyed and sold to quench the burgeoning demands for white farmers.³⁷⁰ The four southern tribes were a particular focus of Washington and Knox as they endeavored to keep them conciliated and their estimated 14,000 warriors at peace with

the United States. "The fate of the southern states, therefore, or the neighboring Colonies, may principally depend on the present measures of the

³⁷⁰ Christian B. Keller. "[Philanthropy Betrayed: Thomas Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Origins of Federal Removal Policy.](#)" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 144, No. 1 (March 2000), p.44; Wyatt F. Jeltz. "[The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians.](#)" *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 1948), pp. 26-27; Albert Burton Moore. *History of Alabama*. Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1934, p. 20; Jean Lufkin Boulter. *The Most Perfect Justice: Alexander McGillivray and George Washington Stive to Save the Creek Nation*. Birmingham, Alabama: Escambia Press, 2019. P. 52.

Union towards the southern Indians,” said Washington.³⁷¹ In 1796, Benjamin Hawkins accepted Washington’s appointment as principle agent for all four southeastern tribes. With the Cherokee largely subdued militarily and the Choctaw and Chickasaw reasonably quiescent, Hawkins settled among the Creeks, the greatest potential source of friction.³⁷²

The Jeffersonian Phase. On the heels of the Louisiana Purchase 1803, Thomas Jefferson and his successors in office openly pursued the exchange of tribal lands adjacent to Georgia, Tennessee and the Mississippi territory for newly acquired lands beyond the Mississippi River.³⁷³ His goal and that of his successor John Adams was to obtain all of the tribal lands east of the Mississippi peaceably, without war.³⁷⁴ The Federalist concept of containing and civilizing the indigenous tribes in place had passed. Removal of the tribes beyond the Mississippi River would allow federal oversight and care to continue, but would guarantee sufficient space between the tribes and the crush of white settlers to maintain the peace. Indeed, obtaining land cessions from the tribes and selling them to eager settlers was seen by Jefferson as a way to pay for the purchase of the Louisiana lands. In Jefferson’s words: “Our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States or remove beyond the Mississippi.”³⁷⁵

The Jeffersonian policy is perhaps best illustrated by the 1802 [agreement](#) with Georgia ([The Compact of 1802](#)), that induced the latter to waive all claims to the Creek, Chickasaw and Choctaw lands between the state’s current border with Alabama and the Mississippi River. Eighty six million acres of land were acknowledged to be under federal control, clearing conflicting claims to the Mississippi Territory established by Adams in 1797. In exchange, Georgia received \$1.25 million federal dollars and the federal government’s promise to extinguish tribal claims in the the state of Georgia as

³⁷¹ Jean Lufkin Boulter. [The Most Perfect Justice: Alexander McGillivray and George Washington Stive to Save the Creek Nation](#). Birmingham, Alabama: Escambia Press, 2019. P. 56.

³⁷² Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 75.

³⁷³ Claudio Saunt. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, p. 7.

³⁷⁴ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 81.

³⁷⁵ Christian B. Keller. “[Philanthropy Betrayed: Thomas Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Origins of Federal Removal Policy](#),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 144, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 57-60.

soon as that could be done without war.³⁷⁶ Unlike Jacksonian policy to follow, Jefferson allowed himself to envision a kind of co-existence in the aftermath of the Compact: “Incorporating themselves with us as citizens of the U. S. ... is the natural progress of things,” he wrote to Benjamin Hawkins in January 1803, “and it will be better to promote rather than retard it.”³⁷⁷

Then, in April 1803, Jefferson and the United States purchased from Napoleon 828,000 square miles of land in the middle of the heartland. The Louisiana Purchase was nominally French, but almost the entire population of the area were the native people. These lands, thought Thomas Jefferson, could one day prove to be the home of the tribes relocated from the Southeast.³⁷⁸ The next year, when territorial government was established for the purchased area, Congress authorized the president “to stipulate with any Indian tribes owning lands on the east side of the Mississippi and residing thereon, for an exchange of the lands, the property of the United States, on the west side of the Mississippi, in case the said tribes shall remove and settle thereon.”³⁷⁹

The Calhoun/Jacksonian Phase. According to DeRosier, the true architect of the United States’ first coherent Indian policy was [John Caldwell Calhoun](#), appointed Secretary of War by President Monroe in 1817. The new policy, articulated by Monroe in his annual message to Congress on December 2 affirmed the dual goals of continuing to preserve and civilize the native tribes, while declaring that the tribes could no longer occupy more land than they could cultivate:

...it is our duty to make new efforts for the preservation, improvement and civilization of the native inhabitants. The hunter state can exist only in the vast uncultivated desert. It yields to the more dense and compact form and greater force of the civilized population, and of right it ought to yield, for the earth was given to mankind to support the greatest number of which it is capable, and no

³⁷⁶ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 82.

³⁷⁷ Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, February 18, 1803, Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (10 vols., New York and London, 1892-1899), VIII, p. 214; cited in Conser, Walter H. “[John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838](#).” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), p. 202.

³⁷⁸ Peter Cozzens. [A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, The Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 84.

³⁷⁹ Banner, Stuart. [How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 193.

*tribe of people have right to withhold from the wants of others more than is necessary for their own support and comfort.*³⁸⁰

In his [1818 annual message](#) President Monroe still emphasized the need to achieve tribal consent in order to achieve the nation's expansionist aims. The elimination of their separate standing was stated to be national policy:

*To civilize them, and even to prevent their extinction, it seems to be indispensable that their independence as communities should cease, and that the control of the United States over them should be complete and undisputed. The hunter state will then be more easily abandoned, and recourse will be had to the acquisition and culture of land and other pursuits tending to dissolve the ties which connect them together as a savage community.*³⁸¹

By Jackson's tenure, accommodation was no longer an element of policy. In the face of a relentlessly advancing frontier, the concept of incorporation of the indigenous tribes would no longer be possible. A spatial reconstruction was demanded of the nation, asserting American dominance across the continent, wrote Dinwoodie. In Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, policies were required that would end the looming presence of the Creeks, Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw, and open a hundred million acres to cotton cultivation.³⁸²

The Indian Removal Act 1830.

For the native tribes of Alabama and the Southeast, the War of 1812 had devastating, lasting, consequences. For centuries, the tribes had been able to move adroitly among the French, Spanish, British and the Americans, playing one off against the others to preserve a modicum of freedom of movement and independence. After 1815 the foreign powers were vanquished by the Americans and tribal military prowess was broken. The Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw land cessions of 1805 and 1806, along

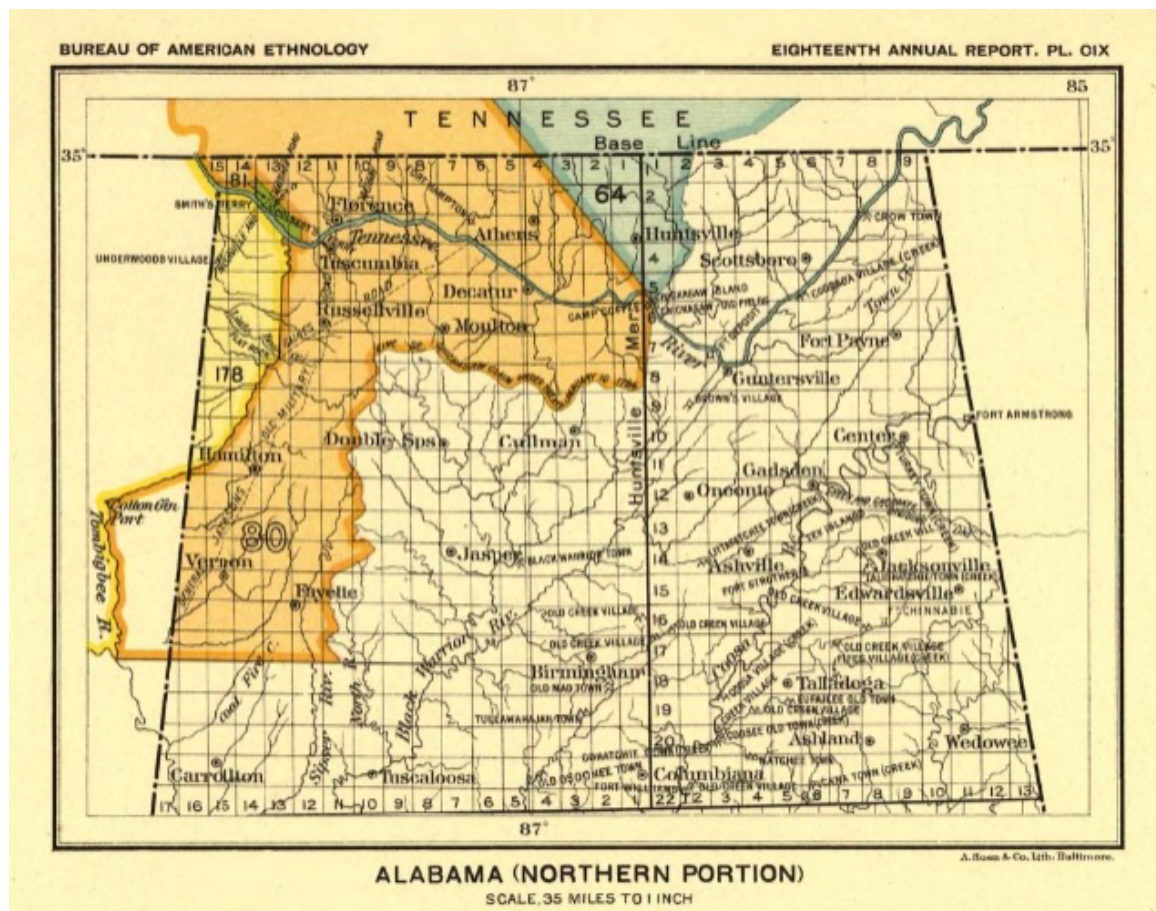
³⁸⁰ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 37, quoting from *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*.

³⁸¹ James Monroe, "[Second Annual Message](#)," December 3, 1818, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California, Santa Barbara; Seymour Dunbar. [A History of Travel in America](#). Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. Vol. II. 1915

³⁸² Dinwoodie, Jane. *Beyond Removal: Indians, States, and Sovereignities in the American South, 1812-1860*. Ph.D. dissertation. Lincoln College, University of Oxford, 2017, p. 13

with the 23 million acres Jackson seized from the Creeks opened the floodgates of settlement in Alabama and Mississippi. The prospect of tribal presences east of the Mississippi became increasingly tenuous, as politicians, planters and small farmers clambered to obtain their lands.³⁸³ The following fifteen years would see the cession of further lands through questionable treaties and bribes of willing tribal chieftains. Settlers in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi would increasingly settle illegally on remaining tribal lands, and pressures for expulsion would escalate.

³⁸³ David Walker Howe. [*What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 74.



38 [Indian Land Cessions in Northwestern Alabama and Adjacent Regions](#), Plate 2. From Charles C. Royce, "Indian Land Cessions in the United States," *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1896–1897 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899). Public domain.

As Secretary of War under James Monroe, John C. Calhoun advanced a dual strategy toward the southern tribes: gradual removal west of the Mississippi for those willing to emigrate, coupled with programs of “civilization” and selective incorporation for those who remained. The policy sought to avoid open conflict while reducing tribal landholdings through negotiated cessions. Yet the approach satisfied neither Native leaders nor the state of Georgia, whose officials insisted that the federal government fulfill its 1802 compact by extinguishing Indian title within the state. War Department estimates placed roughly 129,000 Native people within the boundaries of the United States in the 1820s, of whom approximately 54,000 resided in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and

Mississippi—concentrations that intensified state agitation for decisive action.³⁸⁴

But Georgia remained restive, and resistant. War Department estimations of the native population within the existing boundaries of the United States, placed 54,000 of the 129,000 within the borders of Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi.³⁸⁵ Georgia Governor Troup agitated for the federal government to adhere to its agreement to recognize Georgia right to Cherokee and Creeks lands in the state in return for the state's 1802 relinquishment to its land claim to the Alabama and Mississippi lands. Troup wanted the lands for settlement and he wanted the tribes expelled.³⁸⁶

While the Cherokee initially evaded Troup's machinations, the avarice of [William McIntosh](#) made the Creeks an easier victim. McIntosh was a wealthy mixed heritage Creek leader with familial ties to McGillivray and to [Governor Troup](#) himself. The [Treaty of Indian Springs](#) negotiated with U.S. commissioners in 1825 ceded all of the remaining Creek lands in Georgia along with three million acres in Alabama for new lands in Arkansas and a cash settlement. McIntosh himself received \$25,000 directly. All of the Creeks living within the borders of the surrendered Georgia lands were expelled. McIntosh was the only prominent signature among Creek leaders. While the treaty stood, McIntosh soon faced the same consequences of fraternization as [Old Tassel](#) and [Double Head](#). Sentenced to death by tribal council McIntosh was brutally executed by tribal members for his perceived perfidy. The avenging tribal members were led by Creek chieftain [Menawa](#), a survivor of Horseshoe Bend. Given the outcry, incoming President John Quincy Adams had General [Edmund Gaines](#) review the treaty's terms. The resultant [Treaty of Washington](#) in 1826 altered but did not restore the bulk of the Creek lands. It did defer the time of required Creek departure from Georgia from September 1, 1826 to January 1, 1827.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ *Register of Debates in Congress*, 18th Congress, 2nd Session. Washington D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1825. Appendix 63 "[Location and Improvement of Indians](#)" Recapitulation Table. Signed "Department of War, Office of Indian Affairs. Thos. L. McKenney.

³⁸⁵ Banner, Stuart. [How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 195.

³⁸⁶ David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 255-256.

³⁸⁷ Claudio Saunt. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, p. 35; "[Treaty of Indian Springs](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed October 27, 2024; Frank, Andrew K. "[The Rise and Fall of William McIntosh: Authority and Identity on the Early American Frontier](#)." *The Georgia*

Even after Indian Springs, and the post-War of 1812 cessions, vast portions of the southern states remained in tribal possession. In Georgia, Cherokee lands in the north comprised roughly one-tenth to one-eighth of the state. In Alabama, the remaining Creek domain covered between fifteen and eighteen percent of its territory. In Mississippi, the combined Choctaw and Chickasaw nations controlled approximately one-half—perhaps slightly more—of the state’s total area. These were not marginal enclaves, but extensive territorial sovereignties embedded within state boundaries. Further, tribal constitutions promulgated by the [Choctaw](#) (1826) and [Cherokee](#) (1827) raised the spectre of competing governments within the territory claimed by Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama. U. S. Senators [Thomas Cobb](#) (Georgia), [John McKinley](#) (Alabama), and [Thomas Reed](#) (Mississippi), seeing that the federal government was making no effort to assume responsibility for removal, began meeting to effect state solutions.³⁸⁸

The senators’ solution was to circumvent federal inaction through the various state legislatures, extending the laws of the respective states over the native *persons*, invalidating their standing as citizens of sovereign tribes. As state subjects, the legislatures could assign the tribal persons their particular rights, and it did not follow those would be the same as those of the white citizenry. Their lands would be expropriated and sold. Those who remained would be given small plots as citizens. Such legislation, said the architects, would force the tribes to move beyond the Mississippi rather than to be absorbed into the body politic. As the concept was being elaborated, Andrew Jackson assumed the presidency in 1828. In his initial message to Congress,

Historical Quarterly Vol. 86, No. 1 (Spring 22002), pp. 18 – 48; Haveman, Christopher D. [The Removal of the Creek Indians from the Southeast, 1825-1838](#). Auburn: Auburn University, 2009. Ph. D. dissertation, pp. 26 -39; Banner, Stuart. [How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 198.

³⁸⁸ Claudio Saunt. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, p. 37; W. Tanner Allread. “[The Specter of Indian Removal: The Persistence of State Supremacy Arguments in Federal Indian Law](#),” *Columbia Law Review* Vol. 123, No. 6 (October 2023), p. 1533. Charles C. Royce, [Indian Land Cessions in the United States](#), Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, pt. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1899), maps and acreage tables; Clara Sue Kidwell, [Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918](#) (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Michael D. Green, [The Politics of Indian Removal](#) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, [The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears](#) (New York: Viking, 2007).

December, 1829, Jackson called for the “voluntary” emigration of the native peoples to the west. The die was cast.³⁸⁹

Nevertheless, in 1830, the Cherokee still controlled one-tenth of Georgia, the Creeks held one-sixth of Alabama and the Chickasaw and Choctaw between them held half of Mississippi.³⁹⁰ The 1802 federal promise to purchase tribal lands in Georgia and relocate those living there remained unfulfilled in 1830. Unless federal authorities acted, the southern states threatened to extend their laws over the tribes. As a result, after months of legislative quarreling, Congress passed on May 28, 1830, the **Indian Removal Act**. President Jackson was given the broad authority to negotiate the exchange of U.S. territory beyond the Mississippi for holdings of eastern tribes prepared to divest themselves of the lands where they then lived, and relocate to the west. The Act did not mandate removal, but empowered negotiation. Those who made the move would be supported by the federal government during their first year on their new lands. Jackson was appropriated \$500,000 by Congress to enable the relocation.³⁹¹

The next step for the President was to negotiate the tribal treaties that would effect their removal. Beyond the Red Stick Creeks against whom Jackson had waged his campaign, there were the allied Creeks who had fought alongside him, as well as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw. To accelerate negotiations, state legislatures intensified pressure; trespassers and squatters entered tribal lands with growing confidence. When the Creek National Council protested these encroachments to Secretary of War [John Eaton](#), he responded bluntly that under the laws of Alabama their security could not be assured, implying that removal offered the only path to stability, for: “...at the place you are, and under the laws of Alabama, you cannot be so.”³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Claudio Saunt. [*Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory*](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, pp. 37-49.

³⁹⁰ Ostler, Jeffrey. “Removal and the Southern Indian Nations, 1830s – 1840s,” Chapter 8, [*Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*](#). Yale University Press, pp. 248.

³⁹¹ Ethan Davis. “[An Administrative Trail of Tears: Indian Removal](#),” *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 208-10), p.52; Ray, Johnathan. [*Andrew Jackson and the Indians, 1767 – 1815*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2014. Ph. D. Dissertation; pp. 249-250.

³⁹² Peter Cozzens. [*A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South*](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, p. 457; Green, Michael D. [*The Politics of*](#)

The cultural institutions of the South did not mount organized resistance to this shift in federal and state policy. Denominations—including the Methodist Episcopal Church—were, from a later vantage point, strikingly quiescent. Southern Methodist leadership, including Robert Paine, president of the newly opened La Grange College (1830) and later bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, operated within a framework that accepted several premises central to removal-era governance:

- That Indian affairs fell within federal jurisdiction and were to be resolved through national authority rather than ecclesiastical agitation;
- That social order and civil stability in the southern states were paramount;
- That the church, as an institution, would not position itself in opposition to policies deemed constitutionally enacted and politically settled.

Steadily, the federal relationship to the tribes resolved itself into the systematic removal of the indigenous people from the region, in order to expropriate the lands and sell them eager throngs of settlers.

Choctaw Removal. The Choctaw were the first negotiation target. By the earlier [Treaty of Doak's Stand](#), October 1820, the Choctaw had exchanged some five million acres in the southwestern portion of their lands for 13 million acres in what is now southwestern Arkansas and southern Oklahoma. Article IV guaranteed the Choctaw their rights to the tribe's remaining lands in Mississippi and Alabama until such time as they became citizens of the United States.³⁹³ Acting upon the direction of Calhoun, General

[Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis](#). eBook. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1982.

³⁹³ [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Wyatt F. Jeltz. "The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians". *Journal of Negro History*. 33, 1 (January 1948), p. 26; 1820 [Treaty of Doak's Stand Treaty with the Choctaw. October 18, 1820. 7 Stat., 210, Proclamation, January 8, 1821; "Treaty of Doak's Stand](#)," Wikipedia. Online. Accessed November 21, 2024; DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, pp. 56 -79; Kidwell, Clara Sue. [Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.

Andrew Jackson was the leading voice among the commissioners who secured the terms.

With the signing of the Removal Act, President Andrew Jackson directed his Secretary of War, John Eaton, and his close friend and real estate partner, General John Coffee, to reopen negotiations with the Choctaw for the remainder of their lands. The state of Mississippi was anxious for federal action. The estimated 23,000 Choctaw and Chickasaw were greater than the number in any other state. Tribal removal and the cultivation of those lands would make Mississippi the "Cotton Kingdom".³⁹⁴ The resisting faction of Choctaw was initially led by [Chief Mushulatubbe](#), who opposed the surrender of further land. But in mixed-race [Chief Greenwood LeFlore](#), the Choctaw had their own William McIntosh. He saw the deliberations as means of personal enrichment, and directly managed the negotiations to his advantage. Though replaced by Mushulatubbe after the passage of the Indian Removal Act, LeFlore worked behind the scenes to craft acceptable language for a path to removal. His efforts sufficiently impressed those around him that in April, his position was restored and he was elected chief of the entire nation.³⁹⁵ When Coffee and Eaton arrived at [Dancing Rabbit Creek](#) in Noxubee County, on September 15, 1830, they found 6,000 Choctaw present, the majority opposing relocation. Missionaries, some of whom were sympathetic to the Choctaw intent to hold onto their lands, were banned from the Dancing Rabbit site.³⁹⁶

They had prepared an attractive yet stern package of emollients and admonitions for LeFlore and the other compliant chieftains. If the tribe wished to retain its own government they must move to the western lands; otherwise, remaining in Mississippi, the Chickasaw would become subject to the laws of the United States. Those who agreed to relocate would receive a stipend, farm equipment and subsistence for the first year on their new homesteads. Compensation would be offered for improvements made on the Mississippi

³⁹⁴ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 124.

³⁹⁵ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. [The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi](#). Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, pp. 142 -144.

³⁹⁶ David Walker Howe. [What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Adobe Digital Editions. Short term download; Debra Smith, "[Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek](#)." In, Anderson, Jane, Ed., *A Choctaw Anthology*. Philadelphia: Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, 1983, pp. 31-42.

lands.³⁹⁷ After more than a week of negotiations, and emolients for the mixed-race chieftains to achieve their support, the treaty was signed on September 27, 1830. Some eleven million acres of land in Mississippi and Alabama were ceded to the federal government in return for the 15 million acres in the Indian Territory, what is now Oklahoma. After the ratification of the treaty in 1831, the remaining Mississippi Choctaws would become the first tribal group to gain U. S. citizenship. Each family remaining in Mississippi would be awarded 640 acres.³⁹⁸

Greenwood LeFlore, who had no intention of emigrating, and the other two chiefs who signed the treaty, Nitakechi and Mushulatubbe were each given four sections of land. Fifty Choctaw designated by the chiefs were allocated two sections. Additionally, LeFlore, who remained in Mississippi until the end of his days, was again removed from his chieftainship for his support of the treaty.³⁹⁹

The relocation of the Choctaw took place over the three years of 1831, 1832, and 1833. The process was replete with mistakes, pain, human losses and even suffering – a true trail of tears. In the end, by foot, horseback, wagon, and steamboat, fighting snow, privation, malaria and cholera, 12,500 Choctaw made their way to Indian Territory. About 5,000 elected to remain in Mississippi in hopes of obtaining their own land and state citizenship. For many the land was never awarded and some 3,500 Choctaw would make their way from Mississippi to Oklahoma over the remainder of the century.⁴⁰⁰

The Choctaw were but the first of the southeastern nations to be removed following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Between 1831 and 1833 roughly 15,000 Choctaws began the migration westward. Contemporary observers reported severe shortages of food, inadequate

³⁹⁷ Debra Smith, "[Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek](#)." In, Anderson, Jane, Ed., *A Choctaw Anthology*. Philadelphia: Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, 1983, p. 32.

³⁹⁸ "[Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek](#)". *Wikipedia* accessed February 2, 201; "Greenwood LeFlore," *American National Biography*. Online; Pate, James. "[Greenwood LeFlore](#)". *Oklahoma Encyclopedia. Of History and Culture*. Online; DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, pp. 146 – 164.

³⁹⁹ Shackleford, Nora Jeanne. *The LeFlore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal*. Master's Thesis. Ada: East Central State College, 1963, pp. 49 -51. DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 144.

⁴⁰⁰ DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 165 -212.

transportation, and exposure to winter weather. Epidemics of cholera and other diseases swept through the emigrant camps. Modern historians estimate that approximately 2,500 Choctaws died during the migration and its immediate aftermath, leading Choctaw leaders to describe the journey as a “trail of tears and death.”⁴⁰¹

Creek Removal. In the interval after the desultory Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825, the Creeks faced significant upheaval in Alabama and Georgia due to pressures from settlers and government policies promoting land cessions and tribal removal to Oklahoma. Some 7,000 Georgia Creeks made the forced relocation to remaining lands in Alabama in 1826, but many others experienced homelessness and wandering. The best lands available had already been taken, the Upper Creeks occupying the lands along the Coosa and Tallapoosa, the Lower Creeks along the Chattahoochee. One traveler, crossing the Chattahoochee in early 1828, wrote of “crowds of miserable wretches who had been dislodged from their ancient territory to the eastward of the river, but had not yet taken root in the new lands allotted to them.”⁴⁰²

Under unrelenting pressure and growing desperation, on March 24, 1832, Upper and Lower Creek tribal leaders accepted the terms of the **Treaty of Cusseta**, whereby were ceded to the federal government their remaining lands in Alabama. Yet, the treaty provided, that those who did not wish to their new lands could remain on the ceded lands and receive individual households, remaining on them as Alabama citizens. The cession of 5,200,000 acres would be surveyed, with 2,187,000 acres to be allocated Creek heads of household individually, and the remainder to be sold.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ “The Choctaw Trail of Tears.” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed March 13, 2026

⁴⁰² Haveman, Christopher D. [*Of Sand: Creek Indian Immigration, Relocation, and Ethnic Cleansing in the American South*](#). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016; Haveman, Christopher D. [*The Removal of the Creek Indians from the Southeast, 1825-1838*](#). Auburn: Auburn University, 2009. Ph. D. dissertation, pp. 42-44; Haveman, Christopher. [“Final Resistance: Creek Removal from Alabama Homeland: In the Short Span of Just Over a Decade, Alabama’ Creek People Lost their Ancestral Homes and Endured a Hazardous Trek to the Western Frontier.”](#) *Alabama Heritage*, Issue 89

⁴⁰³ Jack, Theodore H. [“Alabama and the Federal Government: The Creek Indian Controversy.”](#) *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (December 1916), p. 304; see Article II, Treaty of Cusseta, [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services.

With the treaty, the federal government ceased to recognize the 23,000 Creeks living in Alabama as a legitimate nation.⁴⁰⁴ Within a few months, the Alabama assembly created nine counties out of the former Creek lands.⁴⁰⁵ And without federal protection, the small Creek landholders fell before the predation of fraudsters and grifters bent on stripping them of their remaining assets. A last, desperate, Creek reaction was inevitable. Persistent land disputes, broken promises, and settler encroachments provoked violent resistance in 1836 by Creeks, an outburst known euphemistically as the Second Creek War, with white settlements being attacked once again in Alabama.

Ironically, a returning Georgia battalion volunteer, having survived the Goliad massacre, almost lost his life traveling home from the Texas war. In a letter penned June 6, 1836, recounted his narrow escape. Samuel G. Hardaway, a member of the Macon Company and still in his teens, had been permitted to leave the theater, and travelled overland to New Orleans, catching a steamboat first to Mobile and then upriver to Montgomery. Upon arrival there, he was anxious to reach home, and though cautioned that eastern Alabama was in upheaval, and that coach travel to Columbus would be dangerous, The battle-hardened Hardaway and 15 others deemed the danger to be exaggerated and took their seats on two mail stages for Georgia. Making their way eastward, they saw ravaged and plundered homesteads, and fleeing settlers who advised them to turn around. Electing to forge ahead, they were soon ambushed by Creek warriors, the stagecoach drivers in desperation attempting to flee from their attackers. Careening over the rough road, they soon encountered the wreckage of the stages that had set out the day before. Hardaway saw a dead horse and a murdered traveler. Overtaken, their stage overturned, several passengers were wounded, and Hardaway fled on foot. Two other passengers alongside him were killed mid-flight, as he alone made it to the relative safety of a canebreak, killing one of his pursuers with his firearm. He secluded himself deep in the swamp for three days, eating a few wild berries as he found them. After three days, he emerged cautiously and made his way to Tuskegee and safety. From there he made his way home without further difficulty. But the settlers in the area felt the fury of warriors clinging to

⁴⁰⁴ Peter Cozzens. [*A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South*](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023, pp. 457-458.

⁴⁰⁵ Jack, Theodore H. "[Alabama and the Federal Government: The Creek Indian Controversy.](#)" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (December 1916), pp. 302-303.

their homeland. He wrote: "I cannot adequately describe the distress and confusion which prevailed along the road during this time. The inhabitants were fleeing from their homes, and many were assembling for defense against the Indians. The whole country appeared to be in the greatest alarm".⁴⁰⁶

The military response to the Creek uprising was swift, violent, and decisive. Under the terms of the Indian Removal Act, most Creeks were forcibly removed from the Southeast. That year, 14,600 Creeks – some 2,500 of them classified as hostile – were relocated from Alabama to the western lands.⁴⁰⁷ Altogether, approximately 20,000 were relocated to Oklahoma under dire conditions, with many Creeks suffering from disease, starvation and exposure during the journeys. Many died en route.⁴⁰⁸ In one instance, among a convoy of steamships conveying Creeks down the Mississippi one dark November night, a collision with an oncoming tow, sank the steamer *Monmouth*, with 490 Creeks aboard, of whom 234 died. In its report, the *Niles Register* criticized the profiteering removal effort, overloading "rotten, old, and unseaworthy boat."⁴⁰⁹ One historian suggests that among all the Creeks uprooted from Alabama, not more than half "lived to thrive in the rude land into which they were transplanted."⁴¹⁰ Across many journeys, with great travail, surviving Creeks would reestablish their nation in the new Oklahoma

⁴⁰⁶ Samuel G. Hardaway, letter to Robert Collins, Macon, GA, June 6, 1836, published in the *Southern Recorder* (Milledgeville, GA), June 14, 1836. Shelby Foote, La Grange trustee, also quotes Hardaway's letter in his [*Texas and the Texans, or Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the South-west. In Two Volumes. Vol. II.*](#) Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Company, 1841, pp. 255-56. For more, see Elliott, Claude. "[Georgia and the Texas Revolution.](#)" *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (December 1944), pp. 233-250.

⁴⁰⁷ Green, Michael D. "Removal from Alabama." Chapter 8, [*The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis.*](#) eBook. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985, p. 185.

⁴⁰⁸ Green, Michael D. [*The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis.*](#) eBook. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2018; Debo, Angie. [*The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians.*](#) Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1941 Claudio Saunt. [*Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory.*](#) New York: W.W. Norton: 2020; Ellisor, John T. [*The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier.*](#) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

⁴⁰⁹ "Most Distressing Calamity" *Niles National Register*, Nov. 18, 1837, p. 179.

⁴¹⁰ Debo, Angie. [*The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians.*](#) Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1941, p. 103.

homeland.⁴¹¹ The old land would be transformed by slave labor into a large swath of the Alabama cotton kingdom.

Chickasaw Removal. Before his own presidency, in the tenure of Adams, Andrew Jackson advised special commissioner to the Chickasaw, [John Dabney Terrell](#), to remind his charges how the Georgia authorities had ravaged the lands and the Cherokee and Creek populations. By proactively working with the United States, and selling their lands, the Chickasaw could avoid the same fate.⁴¹² Indeed, the Chickasaw, about 4,000 in number, had long proven exemplars in terms of Indian behavior under evolving U.S. policy.⁴¹³ In an 1830 report to the Secretary of War, an agent assessing the tribe affirmed that the Chickasaw had largely attained the federal goal whereby native tribes embraced the role of the self-sufficient farm family, “when they no longer depend on the rifle for support, but it is used more for their recreation and amusement than for the means of subsistence.... [T]he men now ... cultivate the earth themselves, while the female ... is engaged in their household affairs. They spin, weave, and make their own clothing.”⁴¹⁴

By the time, the removal act was in effect, the Chickasaw *metis*, or mixed-breed, were effectively in control of tribal governance. George and [Levi Colbert](#) were careful to operate within tribal institutions, defending revered customs and remaining in good standing with the full-blooded tribal chieftains. Levi, for example, continued to practice polygamy and all promoted the practice of common ownership of tribal lands, enabling them to farm vast plantations with their slaves at no cost or taxation.⁴¹⁵

Yet, in the Alabama region, the Chickasaw proved to be the most difficult to remove. The Choctaw reached agreement in 1830, the Creeks in 1832, and the Cherokee in 1835. Having ceded away (1806, 1816, and 1818)

⁴¹¹ Green, Michael D. [*The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis*](#). eBook. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2018.

⁴¹² Ray, Johnathan. [*Andrew Jackson and the Indians, 1767 – 1815*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2014. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 251.

⁴¹³ Gibson, Arrell M. [*The Chickasaws*](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, p. 141.

⁴¹⁴ Gibson, Arrell M. [*The Chickasaws*](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, p.139.

⁴¹⁵ Gibson, Arrell M. [*The Chickasaws*](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, 142; Gregory, Andrew Grant. [“The Chickasaw Indian Colbert Family: An American Dynastic Era, 1729-1907.”](#) *Journal of Monroe County History*, No. 6 (1980), pp. 38-42.

vast swatches of hunting grounds and peripheral territories, the Chickasaw



39 Chickasaw and Choctaw Lands Prior to Removal

were now reduced to their true native homeland revered by the full-blooded tribesmen, and the metis, on productive farmlands, with other profitable enterprises. Understandably, they were reluctant to give all of that up. Dislodgement proved a difficult task.⁴¹⁶ The tribe was comfortable working with the Americans, and when Andrew Jackson summoned the Creeks, Cherokee, Chickasaw and Cherokee to meet him in Franklin, Tennessee soon after the signing of the Indian Removal Act, only the Chickasaw agreed to meet with him. But they were not yet ready to move.⁴¹⁷

Meeting with Jackson in August 1830, Levi Colbert and other Chickasaw leaders challenged the notion that Mississippi law could usurp the rights granted to them by the constitution and a myriad of previous treaties. But they stipulated, should the Chickasaw be allowed to explore the western lands and select the best possible alternative for their people, they would be prepared to enter into negotiations. Under the terms of the [Franklin Agreement](#), a team of Chickasaw led by Colbert searched for agreeable lands in the territory to the west, but returned to report they could find none. The

⁴¹⁶ Gibson, Arrell M. [The Chickasaws](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, pp. 158-159; Gregory, Andrew Grant. "[The Chickasaw Indian Colbert Family: An American Dynastic Era, 1729-1907](#)." *Journal of Monroe County History*, No. 6 (1980), pp. 38-42.

⁴¹⁷ Ostler, Jeffrey. "Removal and the Southern Indian Nations, 1830s – 1840s," Chapter 8, [Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas](#). Yale University Press, p. 249.

treaty was not ratified by Congress.⁴¹⁸ As the stream of white settlement into the Chickasaw lands increased, and the pressures on the tribe mounted, John Coffee in the fall of 1832 managed to force a new agreement upon them. The [Treaty of Pontotock](#) in October finally secured the terms of removal to the Indian Territory. Under the terms, the Chickasaw ceded all of their lands to the U. S. government. Generous allocations were made to tribal members, from 640 to 3,200 acres based on family size and slave ownership. The government would survey and sell the lands and hold the proceeds for the Chickasaw until the money was required to fund relocation. In the meantime, they were permitted to remain in their homes.⁴¹⁹

The Chickasaw condition worsened. In 1831, in [Worcester v. Georgia](#), the Supreme Court ruled that the Cherokee and other tribes nominally remained independent entities with rights *vis a vis* both the federal and state governments. The findings were rejected by both Andrew Jackson and the state of Georgia. Jackson declared to Coffee that the findings were “still born” and Georgia could not be compelled to adhere to the Court mandate.⁴²⁰ Alabama and Mississippi moved against the Chickasaw and Cherokee with the same brutality as Georgia. By executive action, legal rights of the tribes crumbled. In 1834, Levi Colbert died and tribal leadership weakened, chaos reigned. In the summer of 1835, James Colbert wrote the Secretary of War: “With the exception of the Creek nation, I expect there never had been such frauds imposed on any people as the Chickasaws.”⁴²¹ In 1835, 1836, and 1837 Chickasaw leaders searched the west for acceptable lands before finally coming to an agreement with the Choctaw. By the [Treaty of Doaksville](#), the Chickasaw paid the Choctaw \$530,000 for about five thousand square miles of the central and western portions of the latter’s

⁴¹⁸ Ostler, Jeffrey. “Removal and the Southern Indian Nations, 1830s – 1840s,” Chapter 8, [Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas](#). Yale University Press, p. 250.

⁴¹⁹ Braden, Guy B. [“The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation. \(Continued\)”](#) *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1958), p. 323; Gibson, Arrell M. [The Chickasaws](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, p. 175; Young, Mary E. [“Indian Removal and Land Allotment: The Civilized Tribes and Jacksonian Justice.”](#) *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (October 1958), p. 9; Wyatt F. Jeltz. [“The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians.”](#) *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 1948), p. 32.

⁴²⁰ [“Worcester v. Georgia, 1832.”](#) *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Online. Accessed March 9, 2026.

⁴²¹ Braden, Guy B. [“The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation. \(Continued\)”](#) *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1958), p. 326.

vast territorial holdings. The Chickasaw were finally ready to move to their new home.⁴²²

Over six million acres of Chickasaw land were ceded to the government. The first block of Chickasaw land sales took place in 1836; the final block was sold in 1854. Those tribal members adjudged competent by their peers to manage their own funds received them outright. Those judged to be unfamiliar with finances and legal procedures, the “incompetent” had their allocations held in reserve, token payments to be made when all 6,000 Chickasaw, mixed breeds, and slaves reached their new home. \$3,300,000 were to be held in reserved and invested by the federal government.⁴²³ From those proceeds, accountants in the Treasury deducted all the costs of removal right down to the nails used to build storehouses on removal routes, the steps taken by surveyors, even steamship fares for more than 3,500 passengers who never boarded a boat. In every sense, observed Claudio Saunt, the United States forced the Chickasaw “to finance their own dispossession and pay for their own deportation.”⁴²⁴ Some 3,500 Chickasaw were in the new territory by January 1838, with hundreds more, of varying tribal



40 Cherokee homeland @ Worcester v. Georgia 1831

affiliation, filtering in over the following years. A few remained in the old home territory, living as citizens under the laws of Mississippi and Alabama.⁴²⁵

Cherokee Removal. The Cherokee made an effort as determined as the Chickasaw to accommodate and embrace the U.S. requirements for remaining in place in their homeland. When Alabama

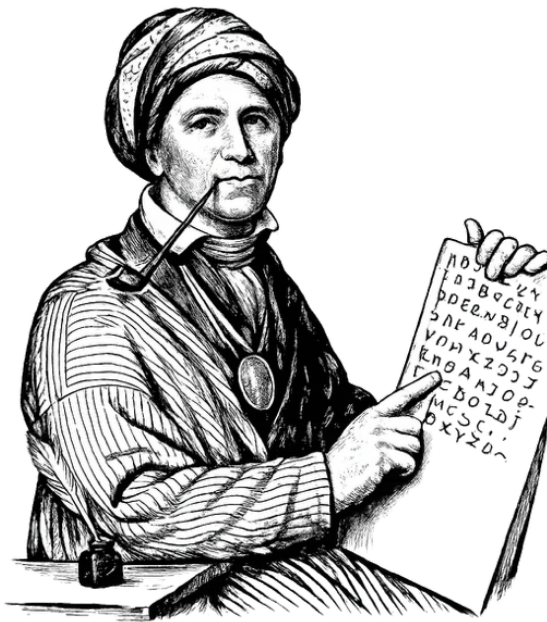
⁴²² Gibson, Arrell M. [The Chickasaws](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, p. 178; Braden, Guy B. [“The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation. \(Continued\)”](#) *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1958), p. 327.

⁴²³ Gibson, Arrell M. [The Chickasaws](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, pp. 179-180.

⁴²⁴ Claudio Saunt. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: W.W. Norton: 2020, p. 218.

⁴²⁵ Braden, Guy B. [“The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation. \(Continued\)”](#) *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1958), p. 330; Gibson, Arrell M. [The Chickasaws](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1971, p. 188.

became a state in 1819, the Cherokee could be found in the northeast corner of that state, the northwest portion of Georgia, as well as in Tennessee and North Carolina. Increasingly through the decades, they turned away from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, adopting agriculture in a style akin to frontier white settlers. Western elements were readily absorbed into the Cherokee culture, including a written constitution adopted in 1827.⁴²⁶ Among the Arkansas Cherokee of an earlier 1817 western migration, [Sequoyah](#), forged an alphabet



41. Sequoyah (George Guess), inventor of the Cherokee syllabary, holding a tablet displaying characters from the writing system he devised for the Cherokee language. After the 1830 portrait by Henry Inman

in 1821. Moveable type was cast by 1828, and the Cherokee nation was soon publishing a newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, with parallel columns in English and Cherokee. In 1825, there were 13,563 Cherokee in the eastern tribal lands, as well as 147 white men and 73 white women who had married into the Cherokee nation. The Cherokee owned 1,277 enslaved blacks. By 1835, eight percent of Cherokee families were slaveholders.⁴²⁷ About 3,000 Cherokee by this time were already west of the Mississippi.⁴²⁸

With cultural change, there evolved a fierce determination to remain in spite of white demands for the land. Similarly, Georgians continued to chaff over the unfulfilled 1802 pledge of the federal government to purchase tribal lands in the state. “Indian title to fully one-

⁴²⁶ David Walker Howe. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 343.

⁴²⁷ Conser, Walter H. “John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838.” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), p. 193; David Walker Howe. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 343 -344.

⁴²⁸ Banner, Stuart. *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 194.

half, and probably the most valuable half,” complained [Thomas Cobb](#) on the floor of the House in 1820, “is yet unextinguished.”⁴²⁹ Through the tenure of President Monroe, there was not yet a federal readiness to address the unpleasantness of removal: “Indian title was not affected in the slightest by the compact with Georgia, and there is not obligation on the United States to remove the Indians by force.”⁴³⁰

In response to one more federal request to sell and migrate, the chiefs in 1823 replied: “It is the fixed and unalterable determination of this nation never to cede one foot more of our land.”⁴³¹ When in 1826 Georgia contemplated a canal through Cherokee lands that promised to link the Tennessee waterway with the Chattahoochee, the Cherokee National Council passed a law that no state could make internal improvements within the

nation. John Quincy Adams, who assumed the presidency in 1825, began to understand that removal of the Cherokee would be the only solution to an intractable problem.⁴³²



John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation during the era of Indian Removal.

42. John Ross

In 1828, Andrew Jackson was elected at President of the United States and John Ross was elected principal chief of the Cherokee. John Ross would hold the title first as chief of the eastern Cherokee and then the whole Nation (1839). He would hold that title until his death in 1866. Jackson, “Old Hickory,” the hero of Horseshoe Bend and the Battle of New Orleans, was an ardent advocate of indigenous removal beyond the Mississippi. Ross, born in 1790 the son of a Scottish Loyalist and a woman who was ¼

Cherokee was determined to keep the tribe on its remaining homelands. Educated in a white academy, a Methodist, a planter, and a slaveholder, Ross

⁴²⁹ Banner, Stuart. *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 195.

⁴³⁰ McMillion, Ovid Andrew. [Cherokee Indian Removal: The Treaty of New Echota and General Winfield Scott](#). East Tennessee State University, 2003, p. 19.

⁴³¹ David Walker Howe. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 345, quoting Walter Lowrie and Walter Franklin, eds. *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (Washington, D. C.: 1834), class 2, Vol. 2, p. 469.

⁴³² McMillion, Ovid Andrew. *Cherokee Indian Removal: The Treaty of New Echota and General Winfield Scott*. East Tennessee State University, 2003, p. 20.

had served with Jackson at Horseshoe Bend. He and his National Party would fail before the combined opposition of the new President and Georgia political forces as well as opposition within the Cherokee ranks, led by [Major and John Ridge](#) of the so-called Treaty Party.⁴³³

Immediately after Jackson's election, the Georgia legislature passed legislation annexing all Cherokee land to northern Georgia counties; another law signed by [Governor Forsyth](#) extended Georgia's laws over the tribe effective June 1, 1830. Ross, called together the Cherokee General Council which declared the laws invalid, and sought the intervention of outgoing President Adams against the Georgia assault. Adams declined the meeting and upon ascendancy, Jackson did the same. Relocation to Indian territory, he relayed to Ross through his Secretary of War, Eaton, was the only effective solution for the Cherokee. In May 1828, Ross returned home and reported the failure to the General Council.⁴³⁴ Over the next ten years, until the tragedy of the "Trail of Tears" unfolded, the Cherokee would be weakened by legislative actions, court decisions, and settler hostility. Poverty, dispossession and homelessness would become telling features of a once pride tribe.

The [discovery of gold](#) (1828) on Cherokee lands resulted in the uncontrolled flood of thousands of freeloading miners. The promulgation of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, though it made no mention of forced eviction, intensified Georgian expectations for access to the tribal lands. In the fall of that year, the sheriff of Hall County arrested a Cherokee, [George Tassel](#), for the murder of another tribe member and was sentenced to death. The murder had taken place on the Cherokee lands, and Ross sought U. S. Supreme Court intervention to protest the arrest and set aside the verdict. Justice Marshal issued a subpoena to the Governor to appear before the Court in January 1831. Governor Gilmer and the Georgia legislature ignored the summons, and on December 4, Tassel was hanged in Hall County from the

⁴³³ Starr, Emmet. *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folklore*. Oklahoma City: The Warden Company, 1921, pp. 135, 167, 184, 226, 26; Garrett, William Robertson and Albert Virgil Goodpasture. *History of Tennessee, Its People and Its Institutions from the Earliest Times to the Year 1903*. Nashville: The Brandon Company, 1903; Conser, Walter H. "John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838." *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), pp. 191 – 212; Moulton, Gary E. [John Ross: Cherokee Chief](#). Athens: University of Georgia Press. 1978.

⁴³⁴ Okison, John M. *Unconquerable: The Story of John Ross, Chief of the Cherokees, 1828-1866*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022, pp. 73-75; Davis, Kenneth Penn. "The Cherokee Removal, 1835 – 1838." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 1973), p. 313.

rear of an oxcart.⁴³⁵ Not even the the positive rulings of the Supreme Court in the complicated case of *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) which found that the Cherokee retained attributes of sovereignty over their lands not surrendered or denied by Congress could halt the erosion of well-being. Both Jackson, the chief executive, and the governor and legislature of Georgia ignored the ruling.⁴³⁶

Georgia continued to press for control over the Cherokee lands and in the summer of 1832 instructed surveyors to lay out the land into allotments, each with a number, that would be awarded to Georgians by lottery in the fall. Under the legislation, Cherokee families would be permitted to hold on to those lots which held their farms, but many of those were lost to the swarming hordes when the drawings were awarded. One newspaper estimated that by the end of 1835, about two-thirds of the Cherokee were homeless. Returning from Washington one evening, John Ross was surprised to find a Georgia family occupying his home. After renting a room for the evening, he located his family in a small cabin across the Tennessee line.⁴³⁷ The fight did not yet leave Ross, but the Treaty Party soon capitulated.



43 Major Ridge, Cherokee

Commissioner [John Schermerhorn](#) called for a Cherokee Council meeting at New Echota on December 22, 1835. Although lightly attended, with only 86 voting members, the twenty members of the negotiating committee signed the [Treaty of New Echota](#) on December 29, 1835⁴³⁸. The Ridges were chieftains key to its acceptance.⁴³⁹ By its terms, the Cherokee

⁴³⁵ Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*. New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007, p. 58.

⁴³⁶ Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*. New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007, p. 63.

⁴³⁷ Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*. New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007, pp. 69-70, p. 72.

⁴³⁸ [Tribal Treaties Database. Public Beta. Treaties Agreements, Documents](#). Oklahoma State University. OSU Library. Digital Resources and Discovery Services; Conser, Walter H. "[John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838](#)." *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), pp. 192-196.

⁴³⁹ Conser, Walter H. "[John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838](#)." *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), p. 196.

agreed to surrender their eastern homeland and move to the lands set aside for them in Indian Territory. The United States agreed to pay the tribe five million dollars over costs and claims levied by all parties, to compensate the tribe for improvements left behind, to provide subsistence during the first year in the west, and to create endowments for orphanages and schools. Eight hundred thousand acres were added to the seven million acres that had already be set aside, and the Nation was provided a patent for fee simple ownership of the whole. After further machinations, and desperate efforts by Ross to scuttle the agreement, the Senate approved the treaty by one vote more than the two-thirds majority required in May 1836. The date for the final removal of all Cherokee to the west was set as May 23, 1838.⁴⁴⁰

As the Cherokee surrendered to the power of the U.S. forces, John Ross offered in a letter to Congress one final lament:

*Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away. We are denationalized; we are disendfranchised. We are deprived of membership in the human family.*⁴⁴¹

In the aftermath of Echota, the pressures upon the Cheorkee were relentless as they struggled to cling to their homeland. Many refused to accept the treaty-dictated rations that were to be afforded inhabitants, fearing acquiescence would force them to relocate. Foraged survival food of berries and tree sap sustained them. In February 1837, [General Wool](#), charged with overseeing removal wrote to the War Department:

*The whole scene since I have been in this country has been nothing but a heartrending one. such as I would be glad to be rid of as soon as circumstances will permit. If I could. - and I could not do them a greater kindness. - I would remove every Indian tomorrow beyond the reach of the white men. who, like vultures, are watching, ready to pounce upon their prey and strip them of everything they have or expect to have from the Government of the United States. Nineteen-twentieths, if not ninety-nine out of every hundred, will go penniless to the West.*⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. [The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears](#). New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007, pp. 76-77; Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014. Pp. 100 – 105; Conser, Walter H. “[John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833 -1838.](#)” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1978), p. 196.

⁴⁴¹ Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, p. 107.

⁴⁴² McMillion, Ovid Andrew. [Cherokee Indian Removal: The Treaty of New Echota and General Winfield Scott](#). East Tennessee State University, 2003. Master’s Thesis, p. 54.

In early March, Major Ridge and members of his family joined a first group of four hundred Cherokee on the winding road west. The first leg of the journey began at Ross's Landing, near present day Chattanooga. In addition to the Cherokee, a handful of Creeks and 18 slaves belonging to Ridge were loaded onto eleven open flatboats for the first leg of the journey. After three days of float, they reached the landing at present-day Gunterville, where tethered to the steamboat *Knoxville* for the tow to Decatur. There they found some shelter from the cold within a warehouse, as they awaited the arrival of an engine from Tuscumbia. Boarding the train in the morning, half the detachment made their way in open cars in bad weather to Tuscumbia, where they camped overnight in the rain. The others followed the next day. There, they boarded the steamship *Newark* and two keelboats, and after a day's delay departed on March 14, reaching Paducah the next day, and finally arriving at Little Rock on the Arkansas River by the 20th of March. One observer, identified only as "R" remarked upon the pathos of the departure in the local newspaper:



44 Gunter's Landing

May we not confidently hope, after all that has been said and thought on the difficulty or impossibility of civilizing the Indians, that it is not impossible and that ere long we may see our Cherokee friends, and eventually all of the race of red men, completely rescued from savage ignorance and degradation, and elevated to the high stand occupied by our white population in all that makes life valuable. R (The North Alabamian, 17 March 1837)⁴⁴³

On the 28th the ship and tows reached Fort Smith

⁴⁴³ Newspaper article as reproduced by Marty King, Lamar Mars, Larry Smith. [North Alabama's Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and its Role During Cherokee Emigration/Removal Beginning in 1837](#). Gail King, Project Director. Southeastern Anthropological Institute, Northwest Shoals Community College, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 2009, p. 247; Foreman, Grant. [Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953, p. 275.

from where Major Ridge and his party disembarked to walk to his lands near Van Buren. The next day the remainder of the of the party reached Fort Coffee where the remainder left the boats to begin their new lives.⁴⁴⁴ Two other detachments of Cherokee would also travel in relatively safety and by rail and water to their destination.⁴⁴⁵ John Ross elected to remain behind and coordinated the overland journey of the remaining Cherokee. Most were transported by wagon westward in detachments under military supervision. The journey of more than one thousand miles occurred during a harsh winter and was marked by inadequate supplies, disease, and exhaustion. Contemporary missionary physician [Elizur Butler](#) estimated that more than 4,000 Cherokees—nearly one quarter of the population—died during the migration or in the internment camps that preceded it.⁴⁴⁶ Ross, some of the remaining elite, and the ill and infirm took the water route down the Tennessee. They were about 228 in the party. In his hand, there are receipts for the purchase of flatboats for the float down the Hiwassee and the Tennessee, and the purchase of a steamboat at Tuscumbia for the trip to their destination.⁴⁴⁷ Because of the difficulty of navigating flatboats through the long stretch of shoals as initially intended, it is likely the final detachment to arrive in Decatur also took the TC&D to Tuscumbia. Perhaps, as the train traveled past Courtland, Ross glanced the promontory of Lawrence Hill and on it the campus of La Grange College. And he might have reflected on how a few short years prior, when assimilation and integration were yet prospects in American Indian policy, that he had accepted appointment to that institution's Board of Trustees. That prospect was now vanquished.⁴⁴⁸ By March 1839, all survivors had reached their western home. John Ross was elected Principal Chief of the Cherokee nation.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁴ Foreman, Grant. [*Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians*](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953, p. 276.

⁴⁴⁵ Marty King, Lamar Mars, Larry Smith. [*North Alabama's Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and its Role During Cherokee Emigration/Removal Beginning in 1837*](#). Gail King, Project Director. Southeastern Anthropological Institute, Northwest Shoals Community College, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 2009, pp. 295-296

⁴⁴⁶ "[Trail of Tears](#)." *National Park Service National Historic Trail*. Online. Accessed March 13, 2026

⁴⁴⁷ John Ross. "[Report of John Ross on Leading the Cherokee West](#)", dated September 8, 1841. *DocsTeach*. A National Archives Foundation educational resource using primary sources from the National Archives.

⁴⁴⁸ "The Trail of Tears." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*. Online. Accessed March 15, 2026

⁴⁴⁹ "[The Trail of Tears: 1838-1839](#)." National Park Service. Online. Accessed March 15, 2026.

Summary. Taken together, the forced migrations of the southeastern tribes resulted in catastrophic demographic losses. Some modern estimates suggest that as many as 15,000 Native people may have died during the various removals associated with the policy of Indian removal in the 1830s. These deaths resulted not only from the marches themselves but from the cumulative effects of disease, malnutrition, exposure, and the social disintegration that followed military expulsion from ancestral lands.

The suffering did not end with arrival in Indian Territory. The relocated tribes entered a frontier environment with limited infrastructure and insufficient federal support. Housing, agricultural tools, and food supplies were often delayed or inadequate, and many communities faced famine during their first years of settlement. Disease outbreaks remained common, and political instability within the relocated nations compounded the hardships of adaptation. Because these events occurred far from the eastern population centers and outside the regular scrutiny of newspapers and reform societies, much of the continuing privation remained largely invisible to the American public. The immediate crisis of removal thus gave way to a prolonged period of reconstruction and suffering in the new western territories, where displaced communities struggled to rebuild political institutions, economies, and social life in the aftermath of forced exile.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁵⁰ For detail on the extirpation of the Southeastern indigenous tribes from their lands the following are especially recommended: Foreman, Grant. [Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932; Green, Michael D. [The Politics of Indian Removal](#). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982; Perdue, Theda, and Michael D. Green. [The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears](#). New York: Viking, 2007; Saunt, Claudio. [Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory](#). New York: Norton, 2020; Haveman, Christopher D. [of Sand: Creek Indian Emigration, Relocation, and Ethnic Cleansing in the American South](#). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016; Kidwell, Clara Sue. [Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918](#). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995; O’Brien, Greg. [Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750–1830](#). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

Chapter 4

Social Impact of the Cotton Monoculture: Enslavement

The lands from which the tribes were extirpated, now legally emptied, were superb for growing cotton. As the tribes made their way west, cotton entrepreneurs in the south were preparing for the opportunity awaiting them; the stories of forced removal, white immigration, slavery, and cotton cultivation are deeply intertwined. By 1850, 67 percent of U.S. cotton would be cultivated on acreage that was not part of the United States fifty years prior.

The basic infrastructure required by the cotton kingdom was already in place. Spain, even as its presence in the southeast withered, did its part by encouraging immigration into the area with generous land grants in the West Florida and Louisiana. By 1800, a million pounds of cotton were being picked in the Natchez area and shipped to market from New Orleans.⁴⁵¹ The logistics by which plantation owners moved tobacco, sugar, and rice to awaiting world markets could be easily translated to cotton. Further, the tobacco lands themselves were depleted, productivity of that staples becoming yearly more precarious. And along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, long staple Sea Island cotton, in high demand by English manufacturers was being planted and grown by Frank Levett, Jean Montalet and others familiar with the global marketplace for cotton. And when the

⁴⁵¹ Dupre, Daniel S. "[The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier](#)," in Sean Patrick Adams. *A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 65, p. 73, p. 75. See also: Hammond, J.C. [Slavery, Freedom and Expansion in the Early American West](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

production of the Sea Island varietal reached its geographical limits, technological innovation freed planters from the limitations of durable short staple upland cotton, whose seeds stuck tenaciously to the fiber. In 1793, young Eli Whitney introduced a new gin with small hooks and rollers that removed the fiber from the clinging seeds effectively, improving ginning productivity overnight by a factor of fifty; further cotton gin technological enhancements to the cotton gin would quickly follow. In 1806, a new cotton varietal was introduced from Mexico by a Natchez planter with bigger bolls and better fiber quality. Three to four times more easily plucked from the plant than [Georgia Upland Green Seed](#) varietal, and the latter was quickly displaced. Other technology breakthroughs fueled the explosion. By 1817, steamboats were plying the Mississippi River and by the 1830 railroads were linking plantation output to the ocean and river ports of the nation. Cotton production spread quickly into the South Carolina and Georgia interiors. Production in South Carolina would increase from 10,000 pounds in 1790 to 6.4 million pounds in 1800. By 1795, U.S. cotton was being routinely shipped to Liverpool.⁴⁵²

Cotton of course, had been grown along the southern frontier for a number of decades, around the river port city of Natchez, in the Mississippi river parishes in Louisiana, and in the newly created county of Madison along the Tennessee River it quickly became the cash crop. With the end of the war with Great Britain, the demand of the English textile mills for more and more cotton grew, the price of the fiber doubling and reaching thirty cents a pound in 1818.

The cotton economy of the south was robust from birth. The seizure of the port of Mobile in 1812 and its retention eliminated tariff barriers and gave Alabama's cotton farmers new sea access to foreign markets. Production capacity grew. Vast reaches of land taken from the indigenous tribes were surveyed and sold by the federal government in 1817 and 1818.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014. Pp. 100 – 114; Rohrbough, Malcom J. [Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p.274; Dupre, Daniel S. “[The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier](#).”, in Sean Patrick Adams. *A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 56; Latwete, A. [Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America](#). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003.

⁴⁵³ Rohrbough, Malcom J. [Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p.279; Beckert, Sven. [Empire of Cotton: A Global History](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, p. 107.

Large tracts of fertile land purchased on credit, an enslaved labor force available to clear and cultivate the land, and a ready foreign market were all hallmarks of the “[Alabama Fever](#)” that swept the east and brought hordes of aspiring settlers to the region. Traveling overland from Tennessee and Kentucky, the Tennessee River lands were easily accessible to settlers and small farmers electing to pursue their dreams on richer lands. They were joined by slaveholding plantation elite and other less well endowed settlers from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. In 1805 and 1806 the Chickasaw and Cherokee ceded almost 350,000 acres between the river and the Tennessee border that Governor Williams proclaimed as [Madison County](#) in December 1808.

Cherokee chieftain, [Double Head](#), speculating in the white world in pursuit of wealth, had fallen heavily into debt. As Jefferson had forecast, land was the one asset that could be traded to satisfy debts and to procure the trappings of prosperity. In the fall and winter of 1805 -1806, Double Head and a coterie of other chiefs, sold some fifteen thousand square miles of hunting grounds in Tennessee and Alabama in the triangle that would become Madison County. Double Head benefitted the most of the chieftains, receiving a \$1,000 grant and a hundred square mile tract of land on the northern bank of the Tennessee River near Muscle Shoals. Cash, annuities and land were also awarded to the other chiefs. Together, they divided the first two thousand dollars of the purchase price among themselves and resolved to set aside the forcoming remainder payments of \$8,000 to cover their own future debts to the government.⁴⁵⁴ The Cherokee reacted angrily to the treaty. Declared a traitor and sentenced to death by the Cherokee Council, which had not approved the negotiations, Double Head was executed by James Vann, Major Ridge, and Alex Saunders. Ironically, Ridge would meet the same fate in Oklahoma in the aftermath of the Trail of Tears.⁴⁵⁵

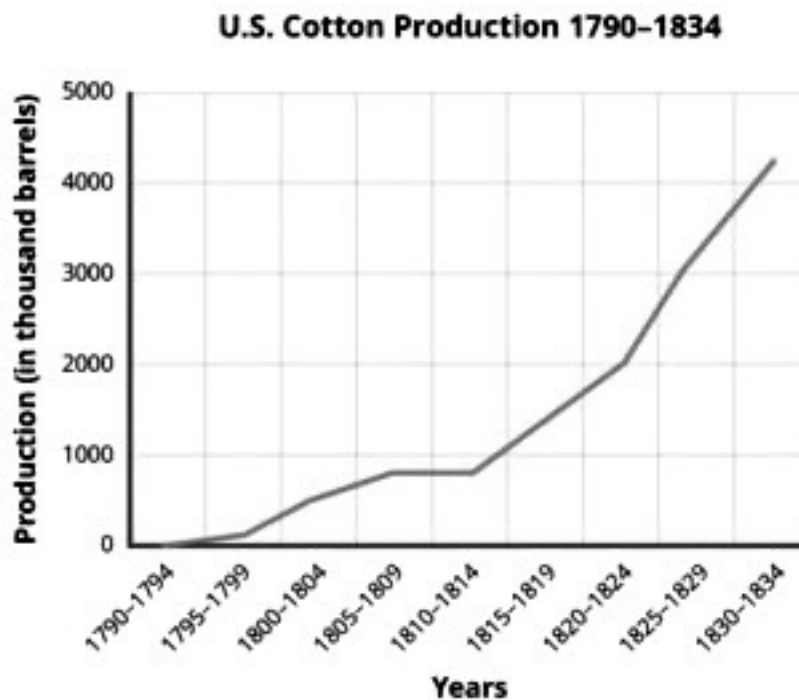
The governor wrote to Treasury Secretary [Albert Gallatin](#) in August 1808, that perhaps 1,300 families were squatting in the area awaiting land sales, without civic authority present of any kind.⁴⁵⁶ In preparing for land sales, an informal census was conducted in January 1809. Some 2,223 people were found to be living in the county including 353 heads of families, 1,362 people

⁴⁵⁴ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.17.

⁴⁵⁵ “[Double Head](#)” *Wikipedia*. Accessed December 29, 2024.

⁴⁵⁶ Rohr, Nancy M. “[Alabama Fever](#).” *Special Issue. A History of Early Settlement: Madison County before Statehood, 1808 – 1819. Huntsville Historical Review* (2008), pp. 3-4.

under 21 years of age, and 322 enslaved people. Of these first settlers in Madison County only 9 heads of household reported ten or more slaves, and thus might be considered “planters”, although no large planters risked setting up estates before the legal land sales. [Thomas Freeman](#), the surveyor preparing the land for sale got to know many of the squatters as he worked his chains among them. They were, he reported, industrious, quiet and peacable. Each cottage grew corn for subsistence, and small patches of cotton. A number of grist mills were in place early, and a distillery was being built.⁴⁵⁷ Among the squatters, [Littleberry Adams](#), with seventeen slaves was one of the two largest slaveholders in the county. With the slaves, he cleared, planted, and picked much more cotton acreage than his counterparts. By 1810, he was leading keelboats down the Tennessee River, through the shoals, to the Mississippi and the New Orleans markets. And by 1815, Adams owned 32 slaves and more than 600 acres of Madison County land.⁴⁵⁸



45 Cotton Production in the United States

⁴⁵⁷ Rohr, Nancy M. “[Alabama Fever](#).” *Special Issue. A History of Early Settlement: Madison County before Statehood, 1808 – 1819. Huntsville Historical Review* (2008), pp. 3-5; Daniel Dupre, “[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#),” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), p. 219.

⁴⁵⁸ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.27.

The first land sales of 1809 brought common farmers down from Tennessee and Kentucky anxious to build a new rich subsistence life on the rich soils of the region. However, from the beginning the Tennessee Valley, like the rest of Alabama and the antebellum south was a slave society with cotton as its base. Ten men, representing Georgia and Tennessee combines, purchased nearly half the land sold at the initial public auction over six weeks in the summer and fall of 1809.⁴⁵⁹ With each land sale from 1809 onward, slaveholders—planters and speculators poured into the valley. By 1816, the number of enslaved people increased from a little more than 300 to 4,200; by 1820 slaves were almost half of the total population of 19,501. By 1830, there were more enslaved blacks in Madison county than whites. Across the valley, in those last ten years, the percentage of slaves increased from 28 percent to 32 in Lauderdale county, from 33 percent to 45 percent in Franklin county, and from 29 percent to 45 in Limestone county. By 1830 there were 40 planters who enslaved more than 50 people in Madison. Over one third of the 60,000 cultivated acres in the county was planted in cotton. Slaveholding remained less prominent in rugged eastern Jackson county, where the yeoman farmer prevailed.⁴⁶⁰ Despite procedures that tilted the initial land sales in favor of the plantation owners, a fair number of the settler pioneers managed to hold on to their land. By 1815, 43 percent of the original settlers had purchased property, the rest moving north toward Tennessee or south and west toward the indigenous lands being readied for sale.⁴⁶¹

Easy credit in the land offices, and some four million dollars in discounted Yazoo stock issued by the federal government contributed to inflationary pressures. By the end of 1818, when cotton prices were reaching 25 cents a pound, a million acres in the western Tennessee Valley had been purchased for over seven million dollars, three-quarters of that obligation on credit. And then the Alabama land bubble burst. In 1819, there was a [profound drop in the price of cotton](#), down to ten cents by 1820. From Madison County, for example, in 1818, \$1,113,000 of cotton was exported; in 1819, \$890,000,

⁴⁵⁹ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.27.

⁴⁶⁰ Daniel Dupre, [“Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama,”](#) *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), pp. 219 – 220; Dupre, Daniel S. [“The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.”](#), in Sean Patrick Adams. *A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 69

⁴⁶¹ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.17.

and in 1820, only \$444,000. As cotton prices plummeted, the debts faced by Alabama farmers and planters were suddenly crushing; of the nation's \$22,000,000 in federal land debt, Alabamians held 52%. Farmers and planters everywhere struggled to meet their obligations, to call in obligations and to fend off creditors. Within a few years, almost half of the land would be returned to the state due to non-payment.⁴⁶² [Willis Pope](#), the son of Leroy Pope found himself \$80,000 in debt but with family help, sale of some land, and a credit extension, he managed to stay afloat. [Philip Foote](#) and his business partner John Taylor were heavily besieged, with store inventory, three Huntsville lots, a cotton gin and finished lumber sold to satisfy debts. Foote's own Huntsville home was sold a part of the re-structuring. Over in Florence, the [Cypress Land Company](#) issued a call for notes to be settled by February 1820. Those who complied would receive a credit of \$150; those who did not would be sued.⁴⁶³

As cotton had fueled the boom, so it ignited the infamous [Panic of 1819](#). Congress attempted to quell the crisis with an 1821 act that extended credit to some for up to eight years, and allowed others to return portions of their land back to the government, retaining the acreage represented by the initial purchase price. Yet, hundreds of thousands of acres of land were forfeited, with farmers in some instances living in farmhouses sited on land they no longer owned. The dawning of the 1820s found the Valley in the throes of an economic depression, the Huntsville *Southern Advocate* lamenting that there was no other region of the country "where trade languishes, to so alarming an extent."⁴⁶⁴ Over the decade, those that weathered the panic would climb back out of the fiscal morass.

But the settlers persevered, and droves of new hopefuls surged into Alabama seeking to pursue their dreams on new lands. Alabama was a frontier, but a relatively secure one, with abundances on which farmers could

⁴⁶² Kennedy, Brenden Edward . "[Mississippi Stocks and the 1795 Yazoo Land Sale: Slavery, Securities Markets, Native American Dispossession, and the Panic of 1819 in Alabama](#)," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (July 2021), pp. 203-239

⁴⁶³ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, pp. 50 -53..

⁴⁶⁴ Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. [The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1961, p. 474. Daniel Dupre, "[Ambivalent Capitalists on the Cotton Frontier: Settlement and Development in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama](#)," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1990), pp. 220 – 222; Frances Cabaniss Roberts. *The Founding of Alabama: Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019, p. 161.

POPULATION GROWTH AND SLAVERY IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

	Madison	Limestone	Lauderdale	Franklin	Jackson
1816					
total*	14,200	—	—	—	—
slave	4,200				
% slave	29.5				
1820					
total	19,501	9,871	4,963	4,988	8,751
slave	9,255	2,919	1,378	1,667	539
% slave	47.0	29.5	27.7	33.4	6.1
1830					
total	27,990	14,807	11,781	11,078	12,700
slave	13,921	6,689	3,795	4,988	1,264
% slave	49.7	45.1	32.2	45.0	9.9
1850					
total	26,427	16,483	17,172	19,610	14,088
slave	14,326	8,063	6,015	8,197	2,292
% slave	54.2	48.9	35.0	41.8	16.2

*Total population in all years includes a small number of free blacks.

SOURCES: Frances Cabaniss Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1956), 403; "Statistical Report of Madison County for the Year 1819, including the Census in the year 1820," in *Huntsville Alabama Republican*, August 25, 1820; *Census of the United States, 1820* ([Washington], [1821?]), 28; *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census . . .* (Washington, 1832), 39; *Statistical View of the United States . . . A Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, 1854), 194.

46 Population Growth in the Tennessee Valley 1816-1850

important cotton growing area, home to many large plantations. The plantations that dotted the Tennessee Valley and the Black Belt came to be operationally defined as landholdings of at least 250 acres, with a focus on one cash crop, typically cotton. There were distinct divisions of labor of plantations and a dedicated management structure.

Generally, Alabama plantations exceeded 1,000 acres, with about a third planted in cotton. The rest raised products for the community that resided there: corn, wheat, livestock and the like. In addition to the plantation home of the owner, there were slave quarters, barns, smokehouse, blacksmith shops, cotton gins, wells and animal pens.⁴⁶⁵ By 1819, 20,000 acres of cotton were cultivated in Madison County, and four and one-half million pounds of fiber were shipped to market.⁴⁶⁶

Even at its lowest prices in 1825 and 1826, says Rohrbough, "cotton sustained hopes for the future."⁴⁶⁷ He continues:

⁴⁶⁵ Alabama Historical Commission. [The History of Agriculture in Alabama: A Historic Context](#). n.d (2002?), pp. 8 – 11. Online. Accessed March 16, 2026

⁴⁶⁶ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, p.39.

⁴⁶⁷ Rohrbough, Malcom J. [Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 307.

*The cotton frontier was several societies constructed around a single agricultural staple, cotton. A planter society put its stamp on institutions and was served by the courts, lawyers, law codes, slave codes, patrols and banks., but that is not to say that the interests of this group diverged from those of other less affluent agriculturists. The central themes everywhere were land, slaves, and cotton.*⁴⁶⁸

The growth was non-stop all the way to the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1811, only one-sixteenth of the cotton produced in the United States came from west of Georgia and South Carolina. By 1860, three fourths of U.S. cotton would be grown there. Even in the beginning with Sea Island production, the U.S. by 1802 was the single most important supplier of cotton to the English textile factories. On the eve of the war, the U.S. was producing as much cotton as China. Political power, unlimited land, limitless capital and a labor system built on the back of slave labor and enforced by public policy evolved a capitalist economy with which the rest of the world could not compete.⁴⁶⁹ Stated another way, the amount of cotton grown in the United States grew from 20 million pounds in the first decade of the century, to two billion pounds at the outbreak of the Civil War.⁴⁷⁰

The Embrace of Slavery.

In 1767, the year that Andrew Jackson was born, there were fewer than half a million enslaved people in the 13 colonies. By the time of his death in 1845, the United States enslaved 2.5 million people.⁴⁷¹ In the South, cotton,

⁴⁶⁸ Rohrbough, Malcom J. [*Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850*](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 309.

⁴⁶⁹ Beckert, Sven. [*Empire of Cotton: A Global History*](#). New York: Vintage Books, 2014, pp. 103-105.

⁴⁷⁰ Baptist, Edward E. "Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping Machines, and Modern Power," Chapter 1, [*Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*](#). Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. 40.

⁴⁷¹ Gudmestad, Robert H. "Slavery and the Making of the Old South." In Sean Patrick Adams. [*A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson*](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, p. 154; Baptist, Edward E. "Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping Machines, and Modern Power," Chapter 1, [*Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*](#). Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. 40.

frontier lands, and slavery were inextricably linked. Dupre points out that the indigenous people would likely have been driven from the southeast were there no cotton, for the irrepressible flow of settlers would have planted corn, or other cash crops. But, were there no cotton, the rapid redistribution of slavery from the eastern agricultural states might have unfolded more slowly.⁴⁷²

The vast new lands opened by the eviction of the native tribes required vast pools labor to clear and cultivate



47 Slave Auction at Staunton, Virginia circa 1830

them. The

played out tobacco lands of the Chesapeake and the surplus slaves that were an economic burden to their owners, themselves ardent supporters of slave state expansion, would provide a ready solution to Alabama Fever.⁴⁷³ While there is much for historians yet to learn of the enforced migration, Adam Rothman provides in his work valuable insight into the development of the cotton kingdom and the rapid growth of slavery.⁴⁷⁴

With the victory over the British in New Orleans and the destruction the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend in 1815, the two massive migrations, one white and one black, into the Southeast occurred simultaneously. Accompanying the mass horde of land hungry white settlers was the enforced migration, often in chains, of a million or more slaves from the Upper to the Lower South. Black males were often forced to leave their families behind as they accompanied those who owned them to clear the virgin lands to the

⁴⁷² Dupre, Daniel S. "The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.", in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, pp. 57 – 61;

⁴⁷³ Dupre, Daniel S. "The Old Southwest Becomes the Cotton Frontier.", in Sean Patrick Adams. [A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson](#). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁷⁴ Rothman, A. [Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

southeast. Often those left behind were sold in the slave markets to produce capital needed in the new lands.⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, the history of the Southern cotton kingdom, from the opening of the south and west following the victory



48 Lewis Miller, *Slave Auction in Virginia (Staunton)*, ca. 1830s. Watercolor and ink on paper. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Public domain.

over the British in 1815, is the history of the emergence of the domestic slave trade that would sustain its growth. Over time, slaves would become the most valuable form of property in the region.⁴⁷⁶

Prior to the land sales in Madison County, only about 300 enslaved persons lived among the early settlers. But with the sales, and the arrival of the planter class, the number of those involuntarily moved from other locales to the Tennessee Valley soared. The property tax list for Madison County in 1815 listed 3,575 slaves. By 1820, the rolls would list 9,255 slaves. With over fifteen hundred acres of land and more than 100 slaves, Leroy Pope was the most powerful planter in the county. [Thomas Bibb](#), [David Moore](#), Peter

⁴⁷⁵ Rohrbough, Malcom J. [Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850](#). 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 304.

⁴⁷⁶ Deyle, Steven. [“The Domestic Slave Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the Southern Slave System.”](#) Chapter 5, *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trade in the Americas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 92.

Perkins and Abner Tatum were also wealthy slaveholders. Within a few years, Pope's magnificent hillside mansion would dominate the Huntsville landscape, and the planter's elegant four-wheeled carriages would be commonplace on its streets.⁴⁷⁷

Though the prospects of slave insurrection that fired the apprehensions of a white slave-owning society were not deeply felt in the Valley, the enslaved often attempted to escape their fetters and seek a better life. Advertisements such as this, usually accompanied by the stereotypical woodcut of a striding black silhouette with a bundle attached to a stick across the shoulder, appeared regularly:



⁴⁹ Stock woodcut used in runaway slave advertisements, American newspaper press, ca. 1790–1860.

STOP THE RUNAWAY

Left my plantation on the night of the 20th of March, negro man named Henry; said boy is about 25 years of age, 6 feet high or upward and weighing 170 pounds—and rode off a clay bank horse shod all around about 14 ½ hands high, black main and tail, with a black streak from the withers to the tail, the left eye out; said boy is black or rather of a light copper color. A liberal reward will be given to any person that will lodge said boy in jail, so that I can get him.

*John Williams, Lauderdale County, Ala.*⁴⁷⁸

Typical of the time and culture, the enslaved 25-year-old man has no surname and is referred to as “boy” three times in the advertisement.

With Alabama's admission to statehood, the U. S. Senate had attained a tense balance of eleven slave states offset by the eleven free states to the north. As the new territories in the Louisiana purchase readied for statehood themselves, sharp tensions

⁴⁷⁷ Dupre, Daniel S. [Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800 – 1840](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1997, pp. 33-37, p. 39.

⁴⁷⁸ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, , citing an advertisement in the April 9, 1847 Columbia (Tennessee) *Beacon*. 21.

arose over the question of slavery and the maintenance of that balance of power. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 attempted to address and resolve the issue of slavery's expansion into the newly admitted states and territories. Missouri was admitted to the union as a slave state and balance was maintained by the admission of Maine, previously part of Massachusetts, as a free state. Congress agreed to prohibit slavery in the remaining parts of the Louisiana Territory, other than Missouri, north of latitude 36° 30'. The line would remain a fraught source of dispute until the Civil War and would be overturned in 1854 when the Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed territories to decide the issue of slavery for themselves.

While establishing an anti-slavery wall, the Compromise of 1820 gave the cotton states room for further expansion of slavery south of the line. And for the while, the balance of 12 slave states and 12 free states gave the South equal legislative strength essential for protecting the future of slavery. At the same time, the Compromise exposed the deepening divide over the issue and foreshadowed the escalating sectional tensions that would lead to war.

When in Philadelphia, studying law, La Grange graduate Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, himself a slaveholder, and a friend took an excursion out onto Delaware Bay and boarded the former slave ship, the *Pons*, anchored at Southwark. The two walked the deck, but were not allowed below deck where 900 slaves had been enchained. The *Pons* was sequestered in harbor, as the importation of slaves were no longer allowed. It had been seized shortly in late 1845 and the slaves freed in Liberia.⁴⁷⁹

Antislavery in the South.

The division over slavery deeply divided social institutions in the nation, including Christian denominations in the South. Most southern churches, including the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian denominations steadily adjusted their theologies to align with the justification and maintenance of slavery, frequently defending it as compatible with the

⁴⁷⁹ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 40-41; "Deliverance from this Floating Hell," U. S. Naval Institute. [Online Citation](#). Perhaps in a flight of license, Hobbs writes his journal note as if the slaves are still aboard the *Pons*.

teachings of the faith. However there were some demoninations, and some individual leaders, who did take direct stances against slavery.

As cotton took Alabama in its grip, the fact of an economy grounded in the labor of an enslaved people became the pervasive reality. But that is not to say that antislavery sentiments were not present in the South before and after the cotton monoculture reached it height. George Washington freed his slaves upon his death, and Jefferson (although. He did not follow Washington's gesture) publicly harbored reservations about slavery. Kentucky in 1792 and Tennessee in 1796 withnessed strong but futile efforts to avoid the constitutional embrace of slavery there. Anti-slavery comments from Southern congressional leaders were common during the 1820 debates of whether to admit Missouri as a slave state. While he opposed abolition,



⁵⁰ James Gillespie Birney (1792–1857), American abolitionist, editor of *The Philanthropist*, and Liberty Party presidential candidate.

Georgia representative to Congress, [Robert Raymond Reid](#), declared in 1820 slavery to be “a dark cloud which obscures half the lustre of our free insitituions.”⁴⁸⁰ From eastern Tennessee where he moved to publish his antislavery newspaper *The Genius of Emancipation*, [Benjamin Lundy](#) declared slaveholders to be “*ipso facto* the most disgraceful whoremongers upon earth; they make a *business* of raising bastards and selling them for money; they keep poor miserable degraded femails for this identical purpose; they compel them to submit to their abominable and *avaricious* and brutal lusts; they oppose the work of emancipation *on this ground*.”⁴⁸¹

Though the voices of opposition to slavery were few in Alabama, one prominent personality in the Tennessee Valley spoke forcefully about its evils, embracing political action as the path to its aboliton. [James Gillespie Birney](#) was born to aristocratic parents in Danville, Kentucky in 1792, the year of statehood. Both his father and grandfather were

⁴⁸⁰ [Southern recorder](#). (Milledgeville, Ga.) 1820-1872, March 28, 1820. *Georgia Historic Newspapers*. Digital Library of Georgia, GALILEO University of Georgia. Online. Accessed March 17, 2026; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. “Reid, Robert Raymond 1789-1841). Online. Accessed March 17, 2026.

⁴⁸¹ Degler, Carl N. *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974, pp. 18 -19.

close friends of First Presbyterian pastor David Rice, and had supported his passionate efforts to keep Kentucky a free state. While the effort failed, Article IX of the Kentucky Constitution established the possibility of the state legislature to pass laws for emancipation. Rice remained a close friend of the Birneys and was a frequent visitor to their home; the injustices of slavery were likely imbued into James from his early consciousness.⁴⁸² In 1817, Princeton graduate James Birney and his wife moved to Madison County, Alabama. Initially a slaveholding planter, Birney's values would evolve and effect an influence upon the state — as an office holder, as mayor of Huntsville, as a fervent convert to Presbyterianism, as the traveling placement officer charged with selecting the initial faculty for the nascent University of Alabama, and as a proponent and organizer of the American Colonization Society with its message decrying the evils of slavery.⁴⁸³

Secular voices excorciating slavery, and advocating its abolition could also be found in the pre-War south. [Hinton Rowan Helper](#), a Carolinian and fire-eating white supremacist attacked slavery from a capitalist perspective. Helper blamed the planter's unyielding embrace of slavery for the absence of manufacture and urbanization in the south and for the relative poverty of white subsistence farmers. His *The Impending Crisis of the South*, published in 1857 sold some 150,000 copies and was read in both the north and south, though in the south.⁴⁸⁴

Methodism, the founding church of the future La Grange College in the Tennessee Valley initially opposed slavery, reflecting the abolitionist views of its founder John Wesley.⁴⁸⁵ Early Methodist leaders in America, such as Francis Asbury, loudly criticized slavery and called for its abolition. However, as Methodism expanded in the South, the church began to compromise to maintain unity and membership. By the 1830s and 1840s the Methodist Episcopal Church was deeply divided over slavery, affirming at the 1836 General Conference in Cincinnati, that the church was “decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism and wholly disclaim any right, wish, or intention, to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave, as it exists

⁴⁸² Fladeland, Betty L. *James Gillespie Birney: Exponent of Political Action Against Slavery*. Dissertation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1952, pp. 1 -3.

⁴⁸³ Early Lee Fox. *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840. Dissertation*. Johns Hopkins University, 1917. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1919.

⁴⁸⁴ Helper, Hinton Rowan. *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet it*. New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857

⁴⁸⁵ Wesley, John. *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. 5th ed. London: G. Paramore, 1792.

in the slave-holding States of the Union.”⁴⁸⁶ Just as President Andrew Jackson had affirmed that the federal government had no standing in the indigenous tribes and the southern states within whose boundaries they lived, so the Methodist Church declared the enslavement of African blacks was beyond its standing. Southern Methodist leaders would come to defend slavery as part of a divine order and as a means of Christianizing enslaved Africans. Two of the Presidents of La Grange College, Robert Paine and Richard Henderson Rivers would play vital roles in permanently fracturing the American Methodist Church.⁴⁸⁷

The Baptists in the south, for the most part also developed theological arguments to justify slavery, emphasizing biblical passages they interpreted as permitting the practice. Like the Methodists, Baptists portrayed slavery as a benevolent institution that provided salvation for an African people unready for life in an open and free society. And like the Methodist, the schism would lead to a formal split in the Baptist Church in the mid-1840s.

Similarly, early Presbyterian leaders often condemned slavery in principle, but hesitated to take firm actions to abolish it. By the 1830s, the Presbyterian Church became increasingly divided between abolitionist members in the North, and pro-slavery adherents in the South. While studying law in Philadelphia, Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, son of a wealthy planter, took one occasion to attend an anti-slavery event at the Presbyterian Church. He found it “very dull.”⁴⁸⁸ The church would split later, in 1861, the the southerners forming their own denomination.⁴⁸⁹

To be sure, opposition to slavery persisted within segments of the southern religious community. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), who maintained a modest early presence in the Tennessee Valley, consistently opposed slavery, advocating abolition and, in some cases, assisting fugitives through what later became known as the Underground Railroad. Their influence, however, remained limited in the southern states.

⁴⁸⁶ Birney, James. G. *The American Churches: The Bulwark of American Slavery*. Work attributed to “An American” at publication. Newburyport: Charles Whipple, 1842, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁸⁷ , Richard Henderson. *Elements of Moral Philosophy*. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859. (Justification of slavery, p. 221 and elsewhere).

⁴⁸⁸ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, 45.

⁴⁸⁹ Noll, Mark. [*The Civil War as Theological Crisis*](#). Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 31-55.

Some southern congregations and ministers resisted the prevailing proslavery stance, though they faced significant social and institutional pressure. Likewise, factions within the Cumberland Presbyterian Church criticized slavery, as did the smaller denomination of Free Will Baptists. Nevertheless, the dominant posture of southern churches remained one of accommodation and support for slavery up to the sectional crisis that precipitated its destruction.⁴⁹⁰

One of the earliest organizations to oppose the evils of slavery, if not to call for its abolition, was the American Colonization Society (ACS). Many southerners, often slaveholders, expressed an interest in the ACS and initially lent a measure of support. In the end, the southern arm of the organization was largely commandeered by slaveholders who saw it as a means to ameliorate the threat of slave revolt in a period of heightened rhetoric. Properly harnessed, they thought, the ACS provided a means to remove the freeman, the freed slave, from among the ranks of southern blacks, preventing them from serving as conduits for the abolitionist message. On March 9, 1852, Hobbs notes in his journal of a trip to pick up a copy of the *Richmond Whig* to read about a revival of interest in the American Colonization Society. Two years earlier the Virginia legislature had voted an annual appropriation of \$30,000 to enable the migration of free blacks to the new state of Liberia, which had elected its first President, Joseph Roberts, in 1848.⁴⁹¹

The American Colonization Society (ACS) had its origins in 1816; its purpose primarily was as a tool to enable the return of freed slaves to Africa. The ACS was an unwieldy coalition of non-slaveholders who supported slavery's abolition and slaveholders who wished to reduce the number of

⁴⁹⁰ Thomas D. Hamm, [The Quakers in America](#). New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 37–60; Stephen B. Weeks, [Southern Quakers and Slavery](#) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1896); Larry Gara, [The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad](#). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1961; Christine Leigh Heyrman, [Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, 252–80; John B. Boles, [The Great Revival: 1787-1805](#). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972, 191–210; William F. Davidson, [The Free Will Baptists in History](#) (Nashville: Randall House, 2001), 87–102; Eugene D. Genovese, [A Consuming Fire The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South](#). (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

⁴⁹¹ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 139.

freed blacks many felt to be voices of rebellion and anarchy.⁴⁹² The ACS attracted Southern moderates who opposed slavery yet feared the consequences of racial integration. Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe were among its early supporters. James Madison served as its president during the early 1830s. Led by vocal proponents such as Kentucky congressman Henry Clay, the Society sought but failed in its early years to persuade Congress to make colonization national policy.⁴⁹³

An agent of the ACS lectured in Huntsville in 1826, and drew the interest of James Birney. Birney sent the Society a donation in the same year and induced the local Presbyterian church to make an annual donation in its support.⁴⁹⁴ By 1830, the Society was making inroads into the Tennessee Valley and other parts of Alabama. The La Grange chapter formed in 1830, coinciding with the opening of the college. Daniel Bestor, of LaFayette Women's Institute and the Baptist Church was its leading spokesperson, and addressed its membership on the purposes and promises of the ACS, a message carried in full in the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* and reported in Huntsville's *Southern Advocate*. Bestor is listed in the journal as the chapter's president; Edward Dromgoole Sims was its treasurer. Among the other 10 members noted were La Grange Trustee Alexander Sledge and faculty member William Hudson.⁴⁹⁵

In the same year, the State chapter of ACS was chartered in Tuscaloosa, with the Hon. Abner Lipscomb of Mobile as President. Dr. Thomas Fearn of Huntsville was listed as one of the Vice Presidents. Five judges of the state supreme court were among the members.⁴⁹⁶ Other local Tennessee Valley chapters included Courtland, with Jack Shackelford as President, and Rev. Alexander Sale among the members; Tuscumbia with

⁴⁹² "Mr. Key on the Colonization Society." *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 11 (November 1836), pp. 339 – 351.

⁴⁹³ "[The American Colonization Society](#)," *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed July 20, 2025

⁴⁹⁴ Birney, William. *Sketch of the Life of James G. Birney*. Chicago: National Christian Association, 1884, p. 10; Perry, Robert E. "[The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833](#)." *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ "[Mr. Bestor's Address](#)." *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (July 1830), pp. 129 – 137 (*The African Repository and Colonial Journal*. Vol. V, No. 12 (February 1830) listed other listed La Grange members: Maclin Sledge, treasurer; Platt Stout; Dr. G. G. Williams; Major E. Meredith; Dr. Silas Webb; Samuel M. Peters; William Hyde and William E. Newell); Perry, Robert E. "[The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833](#)." *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁶ Perry, Robert E. "[The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833](#)." *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, p. 6.

Micajah Tarver, President and Henry S. Foote among its members; Florence, with Judge Sidney Cherry Posey as President, and Huntsville, whose officers were unnamed in the issue.⁴⁹⁷ Minister William Winans, trustee of La Grange from Mississippi, was an activist in an ACS chapter there.⁴⁹⁸ Young Henry Tutwiler, fresh graduate of the University of Virginia, recruited onto the University of Alabama faculty by James Birney, was a participant in the Tuscaloosa ACS. In 1832, he affirmed to Birney that slavery was the source of “almost all moral and political evil in this state. ... [I]t exhausts our soil, corrupts our morals, and is the chief cause of that diversity of interest which is fast tending to rend asunder our political fabric.”⁴⁹⁹

However, the ACS struggled to achieve a foothold in Alabama and in the summer of 1832, asked James Birney to take up the role as agent for the state. The strategy evolved for Alabama was to persuade influencers in the legislature and among planters that the goal was to control the growth of the black population by colonization, and not to attempt to interfere with the institution of slavery itself. In the Fall, he worked through the chapters in the Tennessee to clarify message and purpose, speaking in La Grange, Courtland, Tuscumbia and Huntsville. He organized new ACS chapters in Sommerville and Athens, and reorganized the faltering effort in Florence, which elected the redoubtable pro-slavery advocate John Coffee as President. Despite his best efforts, the state society chapter located in Tuscaloosa was flagging; Henry Tutwiler wrote to Birney expressing his frustration that no more could be accomplished there and requested that his own membership be transferred to the chapter in Huntsville.⁵⁰⁰ Birney turned to Alabama’s newspapers to amplify the ACS message to the citizenry; he contacted prominent citizens throughout the state asking them to sign petitions to the state legislature for fiscal support of the colonization effort. But the response grew increasingly chill to his efforts and newspapers in the southern part of the state refused to

⁴⁹⁷ “[Formation of Auxiliary Societies.](#)” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 12 (February 1830), pp. 379 – 380.

⁴⁹⁸ Early Lee Fox. [The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840](#). *Dissertation*. Johns Hopkins University, 1917. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1919, p. 61.

⁴⁹⁹ Brophy, Alfred L. “[The Law of the Descent of Thought](#)”: [Law, History, and Civilization in Antebellum Literary Addresses](#).” *Law and Literature* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2008), p. 349.

⁵⁰⁰ Perry, Robert E. “[The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833.](#)” *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, p. 8.

carry his editorials or were openly hostile to ACS as an advocate of abolition.⁵⁰¹

In 1832, the wind of hope still stirred. La Grange College reprinted William Gaston's noted address in North Carolina on the threat that slavery portended in the South:

*Slavery which, more than any other cause, keeps us back in the career of improvement. It stifles industry and represses enterprise — it is fatal to economy and providence — it discourages skill — impairs our strength as a community, and poisons morals at the fountain head. How this evil is to be encountered, how subdued, is indeed a difficult and delicate enquiry, which this is not the time to examine, nor the occasion to discuss. I felt, however, that I could not discharge my duty, without referring to this subject, as one which ought to engage the prudence, moderation and firmness of those who, sooner or later, must act decisively upon it.*⁵⁰²

In the end, the initiative failed. James Birney left the state in 1833 never to return, and the state movement died with his departure. He, Bestor and Tutwiler had been among the few strong supporters of the movement from either religious or humanistic motives.⁵⁰³ On La Grange Mountain, Daniel Bestor (1833), Edward Dromgoole Sims (1833) and William Hudson (1833) drifted away, and did Alexander Sledge. The Methodists who remained were those who had affected an understanding with the planter class that the property right of slavery was a civil issue, beyond the reach of the church. Robert Paine, Collins D. Elliott and Richard Henderson Rivers steered the college and the faith to the final rupture. For Birney, he rejected the thesis of colonization, embracing abolition. In June 1834, he freed his five families of slaves, reimbursing some for their services to him and embarked on a long political career as an abolitionist – in the words of one historian, “the first native Southerner and former slaveholder to come out openly and strongly against slavery.”⁵⁰⁴ In one of his books, La Grange Military Academy attendee

⁵⁰¹ Perry, Robert E. [“The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833.”](#) *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, pp. 11 -12.

⁵⁰² William Gaston. [Address Delivered Before the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, June 30, 1832.](#) Raleigh: Seaton Gales, 1832, p. 20.

⁵⁰³ Bridges, Edwin C. [Alabama: The Making of an American State.](#) Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p.78.

⁵⁰⁴ Perry, Robert E. [“The American Colonization Society in Alabama, 1825 – 1833.”](#) *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. 1974, p. 13.

and noted physician, John Allan Wyeth, permitted himself to muse retrospectively over the lost opportunity for moderate voices in the North and South to effect a collaboration that could have eliminated Southern slavery by peaceful means.⁵⁰⁵

American Colonization Society: Gradualism, Security, and the Evolution of Attitudes, 1816–1860.

From its founding, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was not a sectional organization but a national coalition. Its elasticity—its ability to accommodate divergent motives—explains both its early respectability and its later controversy. Over time, however, the regional meanings of colonization hardened, and the society’s political valence shifted in response to abolitionist immediatism, slave rebellion, and sectional crisis. In the Upper South—especially Virginia and Kentucky—colonization philosophy initially intersected with living emancipation traditions. The Revolutionary generation had left behind manumission practices, antislavery petitions, and a lingering unease with slavery’s moral standing. By the 1810s and 1820s, declining tobacco yields and soil exhaustion weakened the older plantation economy, while surplus enslaved labor was increasingly sold southward. In this setting, colonization offered what many white reformers considered a politically realistic compromise: emancipation could proceed gradually if freed people did not remain in the state⁵⁰⁶.

In the aftermath of [Nat Turner’s rebellion](#) (1831), Virginia briefly witnessed its most serious legislative debate over gradual emancipation since the Revolution. Colonization featured prominently in that discussion as a possible outlet for emancipated people. Although emancipation failed in the General Assembly, the moment illustrates that in the Upper South colonization could function—at least rhetorically—as a reformist instrument. It reassured hesitant slaveholders that emancipation need not imply racial equality within the polity. Eric Burin has shown that many colonizationists sincerely believed removal would make slavery’s eventual

⁵⁰⁵ Wyeth, John Allan. [*With Sabre and Scalpel: The Autobiography of a Soldier and a Surgeon*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914, p. xvi.

⁵⁰⁶ Eva Sheppard Wolf, [Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006, pp. 1–30, 92–130.

demise more palatable and less violent⁵⁰⁷. Yet even in the Upper South, the limits of the colonization philosophy were evident. Its gradualism deferred justice to the consent of slaveholders, and its underlying racial assumptions—skepticism about Black citizenship—aligned uneasily with democratic principles. When abolitionism gained force in the 1830s, colonization’s middle-ground posture began to appear tentative and accommodating.

In the Deep South—South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana—the political context was markedly different. There, cotton expansion, fresh land cessions, and the consolidation of slave property as the foundation of wealth left little appetite for emancipation schemes. Legislative bodies did not meaningfully debate gradual abolition after the 1820s. Colonization, where supported, more often operated as a mechanism of social control rather than structural reform. In these states, free Black populations—though numerically smaller than in some Upper South locales—were frequently portrayed as unstable elements within a rigid slave society. Colonization could therefore be endorsed as a means of removing free Blacks deemed economically inconvenient or politically suspect. The emphasis was less on preparing for slavery’s end than on preventing internal dissent.⁵⁰⁸ In such environments, colonization’s practical effect—deportation without emancipation—aligned closely with proslavery stability. Reverend Bestor’s 1830 address to the La Grange Colonization Society promoted that outcome:

Any plan which carries away part of our coloured population, would give the increase of the whites a proportional advantage, and therefore would produce a permanent good, would decrease the probabilities of future collision, and would calm the apprehensions of all.⁵⁰⁹ This divergence explains why contemporaries could interpret the same society in opposite ways. A Kentucky gradualist might view colonization as a step toward emancipation; a Mississippi planter might see it as a prophylactic against revolt. The ACS did not need to be “captured” by

⁵⁰⁷ Eric Burin, [Slavery and the Peculiar Solution](#) (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

⁵⁰⁸ Beverly C. Tomek, [Colonization and Its Discontents: Colonization, Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania](#) (Early American Places, 3) New York: NYU Press, 2011

⁵⁰⁹ [Mr. Bestor’s Address.](#)” [The African Repository and Colonial Journal](#), Vol. 6, No. 5 (July 1830), pp. 129 – 137.

proslavery interests; its removalist core was sufficiently adaptable to serve different regional agendas.

In its first decade, the ACS enjoyed broad, even bipartisan, legitimacy. Founders included figures as politically diverse as Henry Clay and Bushrod Washington. Colonization appealed to evangelical reformers, nationalist expansionists, and cautious slaveholders alike. It was framed as benevolent, gradual, and voluntary. During this phase, opposition from free Black communities was real but did not yet dominate national debate.⁵¹⁰

Polarization (1830s). The 1830s marked a decisive shift. Two developments altered colonization's standing. Public repudiations of colonization—most famously in Philadelphia in 1817 but increasingly widespread thereafter—insisted that African Americans were native citizens, not expatriates.⁵¹¹

William Lloyd Garrison's [Thoughts on African Colonization](#) (1832) argued that the ACS strengthened slavery by targeting free Black people rather than the institution itself.⁵¹²

In the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion, southern repression intensified, and colonization lost its ambiguous reformist aura. To abolitionists, it now appeared as a conservative diversion; to many southerners, it appeared unnecessary or even dangerous if it suggested slavery's impermanence. Douglas Egerton has shown that some proslavery thinkers attacked the ACS precisely because colonization rhetoric implied slavery was a problem requiring solution.⁵¹³ Thus by mid-century, colonization no longer occupied the center of antislavery discourse. It survived, but as a diminished and increasingly sectionalized project.

⁵¹⁰ In January 1813, some 3,000 black men [assembled at the Bethel Church](#) to discuss the deportation principles of The American Colonization Society. Their resolution rejecting those precepts was emphatic: *Whereas our ancestors (not of choice) were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured.* (in William Lloyd Garrison, [Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society](#) (Boston, 1831).

⁵¹¹ Ousmane K. Power-Greene. [Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement](#). New York: NYU Press, 2014.

⁵¹² William Lloyd Garrison, [Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society](#) (Boston, 1831). Pp. 43-54.

⁵¹³ Egerton, Douglas R. "[Averting a Crisis: The Proslavery Critique of the of the American Colonization Society](#)." *Civil War History*, Volume 43, Number 2, June 1997, pp. 142-156

Marginalization (1840s–1850s). As sectional polarization intensified over Texas annexation, the Mexican War, the Compromise of 1850, and Kansas–Nebraska, colonization faded from national prominence. Immediatist abolitionists demanded equal rights; proslavery ideologues advanced a positive defense of slavery as a “good.” In this binary political environment, colonization’s gradualist middle ground lost traction.

Nevertheless, the ACS persisted administratively, facilitating migration to Liberia and maintaining auxiliary societies. Liberia declared independence in 1847, symbolizing both the partial fulfillment and the limits of colonization’s vision.⁵¹⁴ By the 1850s, however, colonization was no longer perceived as a plausible national solution to slavery. It had become, instead, a peripheral reform overshadowed by constitutional crisis. The American Colonization Society’s historical paradox lies in its adaptability. In the Upper South, colonization could plausibly coexist with emancipationist rhetoric; in the Deep South, it more readily functioned as a strategy of containment. Over time, abolitionist immediatism exposed its racial premises, while proslavery radicalization rendered its gradualism suspect. The society was not simply proslavery, nor straightforwardly antislavery. Rather, it was a transitional reform movement whose central mechanism—removal—proved politically useful to those seeking stability more than equality.⁵¹⁵

The Rise of Abolitionism

By the 1830s, the uneasy equilibrium that had long governed American discussion of slavery began to give way to a more confrontational moral and political discourse. Earlier approaches—gradual emancipation, colonization, and private misgivings—proved increasingly inadequate in the face of expanding cotton cultivation and the entrenchment of slavery across the Lower South. In their place emerged a movement that rejected

⁵¹⁴ Claude A. Clegg III, [The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia](#). (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004).

⁵¹⁵ Eric Burin, [Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society \(Southern Dissent\)](#) (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 17–55, 189–214; Beverly C. Tomek, [Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania](#) (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 1–35; Ousmane K. Power-Greene, [Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement](#) (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 23–68; Nicholas Guyatt, [Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64–102; Claude A. Clegg III, [The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia](#) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 197–230.

compromise altogether: [immediatist abolitionism](#), grounded in the conviction that slavery was a moral wrong demanding immediate redress.⁵¹⁶

This transformation was closely tied to the religious ferment of the [Second Great Awakening](#). Evangelical revivalism encouraged the belief that individuals and societies alike were subject to moral regeneration, and that sin, once recognized, required prompt repentance. Reform movements proliferated in this climate, and slavery came to be understood by abolitionists not merely as a political or economic issue but as a **national sin**.⁵¹⁷ Within this framework, delay was itself a form of complicity.

No figure better embodied this shift than [William Lloyd Garrison](#), whose founding of *The Liberator* in 1831 announced a new rhetorical and moral posture. Rejecting both colonization and gradualism, Garrison insisted upon immediate emancipation and full recognition of African Americans as citizens. His uncompromising stance helped define the movement, even as it alienated more cautious reformers.⁵¹⁸ The formation of the [American Anti-Slavery Society](#) in 1833 further institutionalized this new approach, creating a national network dedicated to agitation, publication, and moral persuasion.⁵¹⁹



51 William Lloyd Garrison 1870

⁵¹⁶ Holcomb, Julie. [The Abolitionist Movement. Essential Civil War Curriculum](#). Online. Accessed March 24, 2026; Stewart, James Brewer. [Holy Warriors: American Abolitionists and American Slavery](#). New York: Hill and Wang, 1997.

⁵¹⁷ Noll, Mark. [The Civil War as Theological Crisis](#). Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2006; Noll, Mark. [America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 378–402.

⁵¹⁸ Henry Mayer, [All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery](#). New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998; Garrison, Wm. Lloyd. [Thoughts on African Colonization; or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles, and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color](#). Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832.

⁵¹⁹ Ruchames, Louis. [The Abolitionists: A Collection of their Writings](#). New York: Putnam, 1963.

Abolitionism also increasingly incorporated the voices of African Americans themselves, whose critiques of colonization and insistence upon equal citizenship reshaped the movement's intellectual foundations. [Frederick Douglass](#), among others, articulated a powerful counterpoint to removalist schemes, arguing that Black Americans were native to the nation and entitled to its rights.⁵²⁰ Their participation underscored a central contradiction in colonizationist thought: the attempt to resolve slavery by removing its victims rather than dismantling its structures.



52 Am I Not a Man and a brother?" — Wedgwood's 1787 abolitionist medallion, widely circulated in Britain and America

Yet abolitionism's growth was uneven and contested, particularly in the South. There, the movement encountered not only ideological resistance but active suppression. The circulation of antislavery literature through the postal system provoked violent backlash in the 1830s, as southern communities destroyed printed materials and threatened those suspected of distributing them.⁵²¹ State legislatures enacted measures restricting discussion of slavery, while churches and voluntary associations increasingly aligned themselves with prevailing social norms.

Even in the Upper South, where earlier emancipation traditions had persisted, abolitionism struggled to gain durable institutional foothold. Figures such as James Gillespie Birney illustrate both the possibilities and the limits of southern dissent. Birney's evolution from slaveholder to colonizationist to abolitionist demonstrates the moral trajectory available to

⁵²⁰ Frederick Douglass, [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave](#). Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849; Power-Greene, Ousmane K. [Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement](#). New York: New York University Press, 2014; Davis, David Brion. [The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Imagination](#). NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, p. 172.

⁵²¹ John, Richard R. [Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 257–285.

some reformers, but his eventual relocation to the free states underscores the difficulty of sustaining such positions within slaveholding societies.⁵²²

By the 1840s, abolitionism had also assumed a political form. The Liberty Party's formation marked the first sustained effort to translate moral opposition into electoral action, challenging the major parties' reluctance to confront slavery directly. Though initially marginal, this effort signaled a broader shift: the recognition that slavery could not be addressed solely through moral suasion but required engagement with national political structures.⁵²³

In sum, the rise of abolitionism transformed slavery from a question of gradual reform into a *central moral and political crisis*. Even where the movement failed to penetrate southern society, it altered the terms of debate, compelling defenders of slavery to articulate more systematic justifications and thereby deepening the sectional divide.

The Pro-Slavery Reaction.

If abolitionism sharpened the moral critique of slavery, it also provoked a corresponding consolidation of proslavery thought—one that unfolded across multiple registers: political, theological, scientific, cultural, and ultimately coercive. Over the course of the antebellum period, southern leaders and intellectuals moved from viewing slavery as a necessary, if regrettable, inheritance to defending it as a *positive good*, integral to the stability and advancement of society. This transformation was not abrupt but cumulative, shaped by the same forces that gave rise to abolitionism itself.

Even before immediatist abolitionism emerged in full force, southern observers had begun to perceive external critique as a threat. Northern reform efforts, including early colonizationist discourse, contributed to this unease. In 1823, Leonard Bacon, whose later opposition to slavery influenced Lincoln, warned that the colonization movement might itself provoke sectional suspicion if interpreted as a veiled attack upon slavery.⁵²⁴

⁵²² Fladeland, Betty L. [*James Gillespie Birney: Exponent of Political Action Against Slavery*](#). Dissertation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1952, pp. 150-202.

⁵²³ Johnson, Reinhard O. [*The Liberty Party: Anti-Slavery Third Party Politics in the United States*](#). Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2009; Foner, Eric. [*Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

⁵²⁴ Bacon, Leonard. [*Review of Pamphlets on Slavery and Colonization*](#). Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1833.

His concern proved prescient. What began as a broadly acceptable reform movement gradually came to be viewed in the South as a potential wedge for outside interference, helping to sensitize southern communities to the dangers—real or perceived—of external moral scrutiny.

Chapter 5

The Fading of the Frontier: Tennessee Valley 1820 – 1830

By the close of 1838, the last of the Alabama tribes had been driven from their lands, forced to revive their cultures in the arid Indian Territory. As the lands were taken, added to the federal inventory, surveyed, sold, tilled, planted and in production, the planters and small farmers of the Tennessee Valley and the rest of Alabama steadily pushed the frontier westward. The rudiments of civilization began to appear. Towns dotted the landscape, especially along the rivers so critical to the sustenance of the cotton monoculture. Mobile, Tuscaloosa, Huntsville, Florence, Montgomery, Selma and Demopolis were among the early commercial centers.

As Alabamians experienced the transition from a wilderness frontier to a young society eager to establish or replicate the institutions and cultural components of the seaboard states from which from which they had migrated, it is useful to recall the four different regions of the young state.

First of all, there was Mobile, with its rich and remarkably diverse history. Founded by the French and then modestly developed further by the English and Spanish, Mobile grew steadily in size. Those initial settlers came by water, and afterwards Americans arrived overland, crossing through Creek lands across the center of the state or down through Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw lands in the north and west. They filled the area above Mobile, in Baldwin, Washington and Mobile counties, with significant numbers accumulating even before Alabama became a territory. Among their numbers were Tories who had been driven from their homes in Georgia and Carolinas, all fording the water barriers on rafts, with their possessions strapped to pack horses. The densest American settlement of whites could be found just above Mobile Bay on the Tensas River.⁵²⁵

Above them were settlements largely of Georgians in the area of old St. Stephens and the Mobile-Tombigbee drainage system. Settlers were said to have been clearing this area as early as 1777. By 1800, these settlers

⁵²⁵ Stephen B. Weeks. [*Public School Education in Alabama*](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, pp. 11-12.

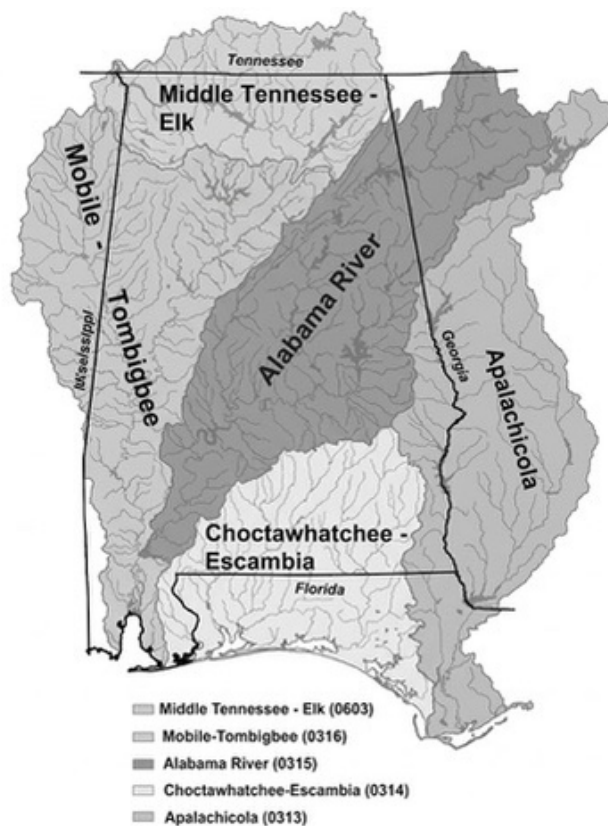


Figure 54 Hydrologic Unit (HU)-4 subregions of Alabama and adjoining states. Adapted from Geological Survey of Alabama Special Map 248B (2016).

were part of Washington County in the Mississippi Territory, and ferry crossings across the Alabama River were fostering further immigration. Typical of the burgeoning floodtide was one party of North Carolinians, who traversed their wagons over the daunting Blue Ridge mountains to reach Knoxville, where they built flatboats to float them to Muscle Shoals. A party contingent herded the families' horses overland to rejoin the flotilla, where people and goods were unloaded and strapped onto the packhorses. From there the route lay overland to St. Stephens and the lands along the Tombigbee, a journey of 120 days.⁵²⁶

To the east, upstream on the Alabama River and Coosa-Tallpoosa drainage system, Georgians were the primary settlers of this region featuring Montgomery at its center, coming in over the Federal road. Creek hostilities slowed settler takeover of this area; the lands in this area were among the last to come up for sale. The same hostility slowed penetration into the less productive lands nearer the Gulf in the Choctawhatchee-Chattahoochee drainage area.⁵²⁷

The primary focus of this study, however, is the fourth area of settlement: the Tennessee Valley and its rich bottom lands. As has been seen, this land was reached early overland by American frontiersmen,

⁵²⁶ Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, pp. 11-12; for more information on the [river graphic](#) click on this [Alabama and Streams Network](#) link.

⁵²⁷ Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, pp. 11-12.

pushing down from Kentucky and Tennessee, or through the mountain gaps on the Holston and French Broad Rivers on flatboats during the months of high water.⁵²⁸

Value of Education on the Frontier.

The urge to reestablish the familiar cultural institutions of their past drove every frontiersman from the beginning. Like New England in the 1640s, after the satisfaction of shelter, houses of worship, and the basics needed to sustain civil government, a frontier people turned their energies to the educational needs required to perpetuate their objectives.⁵²⁹ Following the establishment of a slave-based commercial agriculture, the southern planters moved their cotton and other surplus crops to market to Europe and the northern states. In return, goods imported from afar filled the shelves of mercantile shops; law and order came in the shape of courts, constabulary, and jails; churches were opened. Brick yards, gristmills, sawmills, tanneries, cotton mills and gins were constructed. For many, money became more accessible and standards of living improved. Architectural influences from beyond the primeval forests produced more appealing and functional buildings; brick and clapboard replaced unhewn log cabins; furnishings advanced from handmade pieces to imported elegance in many homes. Private schools emerged to provide the affluent white with the requisite education with which their parents were familiar before the migration.⁵³⁰

Yet, while the state of Alabama paid lip service to the idea of accessible education for all, progress toward an effective system of public schools languished throughout the years leading to the Civil War. Looking back on those years, one observer writing in the *Alabama Educational Journal* in January 1857 declared:

The increase of wealth and energy has given us comfortable and some elegant private residences. Large and beautiful churches have been erected. Public spirit has also extended to the erection of commodious jails and courthouses. ... A large number of the schoolhouses in our State have come under our observation and of

⁵²⁸ Stephen B. Weeks. [*Public School Education in Alabama*](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, pp. 11-12.

⁵²⁹ [*New England's First Fruits*](#). London Henry Overton, 1643, p. 22. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download.

⁵³⁰ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1951, p. 157.

*this number, we truthfully say that at least nineteen-twentieths are in unfinished condition – without chimneys or stoves, either unceiled or unplastered, badly ventilated or entirely without windows, miserably furnished with benches and desks, with no place for water buckets or dinner buckets, and in every respect the most uninviting homes in the entire vicinity. The outside appearances are, if anything, worse – the houses unpainted, the grounds unimproved, no shade trees or shrubbery, no pleasant playyards.*⁵³¹

As crude schoolyards emerged across the frontier, usually the one-room log cabins described above, where a single teacher of often untested credentials held sway, the public embrace of higher education lagged, especially for institutions not associated with the training of Protestant ministers to serve the burgeoning population. Several interrelated factors deeply embedded in the regional social, economic, and cultural fabric can account for the slow uptake.

The agrarian economy prioritized agricultural pursuits over industrial or intellectual endeavors. Investments in higher education were often viewed as superfluous, seen as diverting resources from the primary economic activities of the region. Additionally, the sparse population distribution in many areas made the establishment and maintenance of educational institutions logistically challenging and financially burdensome. Resistance to local taxation for funding schools further impeded the development of educational infrastructure. Indeed, there was no general law exempting school property from taxation until 1832.⁵³²

Too, the Southern social hierarchy placed a premium on traditional roles and norms, firmly committed to the maintenance of the *status quo*. Education, and especially higher education, was viewed by many as potentially disruptive of established social structures, leading individuals to question prevailing norms, threatening the existing order. The suspicion was deepened in some quarters by the commitment to the maintenance of slavery. For the enslaved and freed blacks alike, education was seen as a pathway to resistance and insurrection. Indeed, laws were commonplace in

⁵³¹ *Alabama Educational Journal*, January 1857, quoted in Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913., p. 70.

⁵³² Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 16.

Southern states prohibiting education of slaves –an indirect acknowledgement of education’s transformative power.⁵³³

Likewise, the Southern church, reflecting the conservatism and economic priorities of its constituents, was slow to embrace higher education. While ministerial training was deemed necessary, broader educational initiatives were often viewed with suspicion, leading to a slower development of higher education institutions in the region compared with other parts of the United States.

Harriet Martineau wrote of her travels through Alabama, noting the ways in which a former South Carolina friend, now living in 1835 in her dog trot Alabama log cabin maintained her family:

It is not difficult to procure the necessaries and comforts of life. Most articles of food are provided on plantation. Wine and groceries are obtained from Mobile or New Orleans; and clothing and furniture from the North. Tea is twenty shillings English per pound; brown sugar threepence-halfpenny; white sugar, sixpence-halfpenny. A gentleman’s family where there are children to be educated cannot live for less than seven hundred pounds to one thousand pounds per annum. The sons take land and buy slaves very early; and the daughters marry almost in childhood; so that education is less thought of, and sooner ended, than in almost any part of the world.⁵³⁴

Nevertheless, there was considerable lip service paid to the value of the education of the pioneer citizenry. As Samuel Granade notes, newspaper editors across Alabama would wax eloquently the the value of education and their own devotion to the same. As towns and villages formed, debating societies frequently emerged, and itinerant educators formed schools in support of local interests. Subscription libraries and reading rooms emerged, and lecturers on a range of disparate topics trooped to town to entertain the populace for a modest fee. Public meetings were seldom concluded without a toast to the virtues of education.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ Tennessee State University. [Library Guide](#). “Historically Black Colleges and Universities, n.d.” Accessed March 30, 2025.

⁵³⁴ Martineau, Harriet. [Society in America](#). 2 vols. New York. Saunders and Otley, 1837. Vol. 1, p. 221.

⁵³⁵ Granade, Samuel Ray. [Higher Education in Antebellum Alabama](#). Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1972, p. 18.

Alabama Schools.

The first school for which any record exists was one opened by New Englander John Pierce on the Tensas River, as early as 1779 according to Pickett. "There," he wrote, "the high-blooded descendants of Lachlan McGillivray, the Taites, Weatherfords, and Durants, the aristocratic Lindners, the wealthy Mimses, and the children of many others first learned to read."⁵³⁶ A private school, it was typical of the efforts of frontier pioneers to extend the rudiments of education to their children. Likely there were no textbooks available to the students, with perhaps copies of spelling, geography and arithmetic books owned by schoolmaster Pierce serving as the means of instruction. While no trace remains of the school on the shores of Boatyard Lake, it was almost certainly a crude log cabin with puncheon floors and without paned windows -- classes meeting irregularly to fit the schedules of schoolmaster and students often called to perform agricultural chores. John and his brother William were mercantilists and the area's first cotton ginner at their premises on Boatyard lake. The school tuition provided a welcome supplement to their income. There are no records of the school's length of operation in the Boatyard.⁵³⁷

The first school to be incorporated in the Mississippi Territory was Washington Academy, in Saint Stephens, in 1811. The academy was exempted from taxation and given authority to raise \$5,000 by lottery to fund its operation. No taxes were directed to its support. Indicative that it was slow to move beyond the paper planning stage, its charter was amended in 1814 to allow it to be sited in either Washington County (the 1811 charter) or Clarke County. It appears to have been up and running by again 1816.⁵³⁸ The second school to be chartered was the [Green Academy](#) in Huntsville, the leading township in the Tennessee Valley. Green was chartered one year later, in 1812.⁵³⁹ The first log cabin school in Lauderdale County was

⁵³⁶ Pickett, Albert James. [History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period](#). Vol. 1. 2nd Ed. Charleston: Walker and James, 1851], p. 469; Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 17.

⁵³⁷ "[Early Education in Alabama](#)," *Baldwin County Historical Society, Inc. Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (October 1977), pp. 23-24.

⁵³⁸ Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 18.

⁵³⁹ Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 17; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, pp. 33-34.

established in 1816. Alexander Faires, local Methodist minister, was the teacher.⁵⁴⁰ In the town of Florence proper, John Coffee and Dr. John Bedford established a school between their plantations, with James Lorange as the most prominent schoolmaster over the early years; instruction would continue on that site until 1875. Charles Sullivan, and Episcopalian clergyman Wall also operated early schools in Florence.⁵⁴¹

As the first settlers of Alabama came from the other southern states settled earlier, they brought with them the educational systems experienced there. Those systems produced private schools and academies, organized and conducted independent of any state action or review. The most expected of the authorities was incorporation, the charter. That action by the state gave the trustees and their schools legal existence and endowed them with the full powers to conduct their craft. As the case with the Green Academy, the first schools in the Tennessee Valley were private schools accessible by the more affluent. For the most part, the charters approved by the legislature were written in the most general terms, giving the trustees wide scope of endeavor. School reports to reviewing state authority were not required and no supervision was exercised. As one historian of the education process observed, “the State was content to give the schools official life and then let each work out its own salvation.” The state deliberately played little part.⁵⁴²

Wyeth recalls his own initial experience in one of the mountain schools around Guntersville:

At five years of age I was taken to school; and here again fright comes in, for I doubt if any wretch riding toward the guillotine ever suffered more than did this victim of civilization on this occasion. The teacher who presided the present incumbent had not spared the rod; in fact, had whipped two of his boy pupils so

⁵⁴⁰ W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications. 2003, p. 78.

⁵⁴¹ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical. Illustrated](#). Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 290; H. C. Gilbert. “[H. C. Gilbert’s Address to the Florence Rotary Club](#), 12 September 1921.” [Online resource](#). Accessed March 31, 2025, n. p; W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications. 2003, p. 78; W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 17.

⁵⁴² Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 17; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, pp.16.

*severely that his services were dispensed with. ... "Mr Dave" was, however, a mild-mannered man, and, wheile he kept a long hickory switch in the chimney corner near his chair it was only a reminder of the possibilities which might follow bad behavior. The worst he ever did was to "thump" us on the head with the last knuckle of one finger, and usually we got this punishment for misspelling a word or for some shortcoming in our studies. My first, and I believe, only experience came with a day or two after I began.*⁵⁴³

Looking back to his own experience after leaving settled Person County, North Carolina in 1814 for Giles County, Tennessee, Robert Paine recalled the emptiness his family felt with the paucity of schools and churches on the frontier. To the best of his recollection, it was likely his mother that taught him the alphabet and the rudiments of reading, and he recalled as a young tyke, reciting from memory contemporary poetry to please his grandparents. The first formal exposure to schoolroom education came from itinerant teacher Robert Childers, with Paine boarding during the week in a home some distance from his family. Paine lost his mother and his uncle in those early years on the frontier, and while he acknowledged his father's steadfast efforts to provide for the family, he still brooded across the vastness of time about the wisdom of seeking fortune in the newly opened lands. "Better to have staid in North Carolina, educated and trained the children there, and then let them go out into the world equipped for the battle of life. There was really no necessity in it; and if there had been, a smaller amount of land, with better advantages of society, health and comfort, might have been readily obtained."⁵⁴⁴

An educated citizenry could transform the frontier. The Land Ordinance of 1785, specified that the newly opened territories were to be divided into townships made of 36 sections of 36 square miles. One of those sections in each township was to be set aside "for the maintenance of public schools."⁵⁴⁵ The March 2, 1819 enabling act admitting Alabama into the United States provided that the proceeds of the sale of 16th section in every

⁵⁴³ Wyeth, John Allan. [*With Sabre and Scalpel: The Autobiography of a Soldier and a Surgeon*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁴ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [*Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*](#). Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974. Accessible: Internet Archive, pp. 1-14.

⁵⁴⁵ Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 27, pp. 250-252; [*American Educational History: A Hypertext Timeline*](#).

township could be used by the citizenry for the use of schools. Further, the proceeds from one entire township, 36 sections, would be directed toward a state university, or seminary of higher learning in the parlance of the day.⁵⁴⁶ The potential of the Ordinance was slow to be recognized in Alabama.

By 1824, Florence began efforts to educate women. John Coffee was again one of the organizers of the first female academy, and Mr. and Mrs. Berry served as instructors at what was known as the Berry School in popular parlance. Thirteen families, including John Coffee and James Jackson, initially enrolled their daughters in the private school, paying a semester tuition of \$27.50. For the young women coming in for the week for instruction, returning home on weekends, the board was \$10 monthly. Art, dance, painting and piano were among the offerings available.⁵⁴⁷

The establishment of the Florence Male Academy, or “Prepdom,” in 1834 marked an advance for male education in Florence. Among its noted instructors were Presbyterian ministers James L. Sloss, perhaps Elijah Slack and Thomas Neville Waul; it would serve the community well for 20 years, its role folded into the preparatory school component of Florence Wesleyan University when it would arrive on the scene in 1855.⁵⁴⁸

Across the river from Florence, the Methodist minister John M. Harris, established a academy for boys early after the town’s charter. The Tuscumbia Female Academy was chartered by the legislature the same day, January 13, 1826. Not far away, up on Lawrence’s Hill, the future site of La Grange College, the LaFayette Academy was founded the same month. Opened initially as a school for girls. One of the students, [Mary Winifred Sledge](#), daughter of prominent local physician (and Academy trustee) [Alexander Sledge](#), would in later years marry a president of La Grange College, Dr. [Edward Wadsworth](#). The wealthy planters of the area provided a commodious two story brick building for the schoolhouse, naming the academy in honor of General Lafayette. Initially under the oversight of Mr. and Mrs. Hall, the academy would soon achieve regional reknown under the

⁵⁴⁶ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p.35.

⁵⁴⁷ W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications. 2003, p. 79.

⁵⁴⁸ W. L. McDonald. [A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Bluewater Publications. 2003, pp. 80 -81; H. C. Gilbert. “H. C. Gilbert’s Address to the Florence Rotary Club, 12 September 1921.” [Online resource](#). Accessed March 31, 2025, n. p.

leadership of the Reverend [Daniel Perrin Bestor](#), Baptist minister, who served from late 1826 to 1835. Shortly before the mountain became home to La Grange College, [Edward Dromgoole Sims](#) would open “a school of high grade for boys” there. From all appearances, the male school ran in concert with the girl’s Lafayette Academy. Sims would subsequently become a professor of the college itself.⁵⁴⁹

Another of the educators who found his way into the Tennessee Valley was John Fraser (1801-1882) of Petersburg, Virginia. Fraser studied at the Royal Academy in Inverness, Scotland and at Harvard where he was an acquaintance of Ralph Waldo Emerson. After opening a school in Courtland, in 1838 or so, he and his wife Martha Wyche (1807 -1882) established the Classical Institute in Athens, Alabama and taught a number of prominent Alabamians in their time. Thomas Hobbs, diarist, La Grange student and prominent Athenian studied Greek, Latin, Algebra, Geometry Reading, Writing and Spelling as a 14-year old at the Institute. Finishing his school year in April 1841, he writes that he is completing the 11th book of the *Aeneid*, as well as his *Introduction to Latin Syntax*. A borrowed copy of Comstock’s *Physiology* also held his attention. Hobbs was also a member of the Institute’s Philomatic Society, which included among its members Robert [Coman Brikell](#) and [Elbert Hartwell English](#) the future Chief Justices of the Alabama and Arkansas Supreme Courts respectively. The Fraser’s own son, [James Hubbard Fraser](#) (1840-1919), attended the La Grange Military Academy 1860-61, and was wounded three times during the Civil War.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ , Richard Henderson. “[Early Methodist Educators](#),” *Methodist Quarterly Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (July 1890), pp. 223-235; Thomas McAdory Owen. [History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). In Four Volumes. Volume 1. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company. 1921, p. 302; W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9; Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 125-125; Stephen B. Weeks. [Public School Education in Alabama](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 24; Kern, A.A. “[A Pioneer in Anglo Saxon.](#)” *The Sewanee Review* 11, 3 (July 1903), p. 337-344.

⁵⁵⁰ [John F. Fraser](#), *Find a Grave*. [Online](#). Accessed March 31, 2025. Additional information on Fraser can be found in Christine Williams Edwards, et. al. [The Lure and Lore of Limestone County: Containing a history and genealogical materials of more than two hundred houses of the nineteenth century](#). Tuscaloosa: Portals Press, 1990; Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, {and} La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 136; [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was](#)

Higher Education in Alabama and the Tennessee Valley.

In the period between the forced removal of the Creeks, Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw and the influx of cotton plantation wealth, there was almost no interlude. The frontier moved on and a culture replicative of the coastal South was imposed. It was in this context of an increasingly settled population, with a growing number of its more affluent youth achieving an exposure to classical education in private schools, that the interest in creating the next level of education grew. In the legislature, the conversations regarding the establishment of a state university had begun, as had discussions of its location.

The constitutional convention met in Huntsville in July 1819, and adopted the following articles as part of the fundamental laws of the new state:

*Schools, and the means of education, shall forever be encouraged in this State; and the General Assembly shall take measures to preserve, from unnecessary waste or damage, such lands as are or hereafter may be granted by the United States for the use of schools within each township in this State, and apply the funds which may be raised from such lands in strict conformity to the object of such grant. The General Assembly shall take like measures for the improvement of such lands as have been or may be hereafter granted by the United States to this State for the support of a seminary of learning, and the moneys which may be raised from such lands by rent, lease, or sale, or from any other quarter, for the purpose aforesaid, shall be and remain a fund for the exclusive support of a State University, for the promotion of the arts, literature, and the sciences; and it shall be the duty of the General Assembly, as early as may be, to provide effectual means for the improvement and permanent security of the funds and endowments of such institution.*⁵⁵¹

Given the momentum of the times, however, it appears that most of the schooling remained private, supported entirely from private sources, although poorer white children were sometimes permitted to attend gratis. In Huntsville, a school on the “Lancastrian plan” was chartered, with a lottery authorized to fund a school building. Greenville County in 1826 was allowed

[Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 9; “Elbert Hartwell English,” [Encyclopedia of Arkansas](#) Online. Accessed April 1, 2025.

⁵⁵¹ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 40.

to hold \$10,000 in property and to raise \$5,000 by lottery; the Tuscaloosa Library company was authorized a lottery to raise \$1,000 and to hold a property limit of \$5,000. In the next year, the Franklin Female Academy in Russellville, with a separate male department, was specifically exempted from taxation. The students at the Athen Male Academy were exempted from military service, as were the instructors.⁵⁵²

The window of opportunity for higher learning took an important turn in 1819, the year Alabama became a state. In that year, in the ruling *The Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, the U.S. Supreme Court denied the right of the state of New Hampshire to alter a college's charter without the latter's consent. The notion of independent colleges freer from government oversight was born, with a correspondingly reduced role for government in the founding of colleges or their operation.⁵⁵³

The first Alabama General Assembly convened in Huntsville in October 1819. As in South Carolina, where the elite were slow to embrace the notion of a public system of grammar schools, most planters agreed access to a public institution of higher education would contribute to the prosperity of Alabama.⁵⁵⁴ Governor William Bibb underscored to the assembly the importance of the grant of federal lands for the support of public education in Alabama. On December 18, an act was passed for a "seminary of learning" to be deemed the University of Alabama and for the appointment of three commissioners in every county, with land designated for the University to immediately leased for a period of one year.⁵⁵⁵

The citizenry also looked toward its churches to offer a private solution to college as well. Denominational colleges became a hallmark of villages on the expanding frontier. Through the three decades between the opening of the University of Alabama and the beginning of the Civil War, the religious denominations would be instrumental in upgrading the higher education

⁵⁵² Stephen B. Weeks. [*Public School Education in Alabama*](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, pp. 19-20; W. L. McDonald. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p.3.

⁵⁵³ Cohen, Michael David. [*Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p.4.

⁵⁵⁴ Dorn, Charles. [*For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America*](#). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017, p. 31.

⁵⁵⁵ Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, pp. 31-32; Stephen B. Weeks. [*Public School Education in Alabama*](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 17.

experience in Alabama. This study focuses on one of those, the Methodist sponsorship of La Grange College. But there would be many others. In addition to La Grange, the Methodists sponsored Southern University (1856), and Tuskegee Female College (1856). The Baptists formed Judson Female College (1839) and Howard College (1841). In Mobile, the Catholic Church established Spring Hill College (1830, chartered 1836). In their day, La Grange, Judson, Spring Hill and Howard earned reputations for excellence. Their course work conformed to the national educational standards of the time, and the campuses featured impressive buildings, libraries and laboratories. In the years before the Civil War, La Grange College would boast enrollments as large as the University of Alabama.⁵⁵⁶

The Kentucky Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church came into being in 1820, boasting a membership of 16,000 churchgoers. With the improvement of education a high priority, a committee appointed by the Conference effected a merger with the existing Bracken Academy (1798); in 1822 the Kentucky legislature chartered the college, the first long-lived Methodist institution in the United States. It would remain open until 1849, in its later years under the sponsorship of the Ohio Conference. Short of funds and on the wrong side of the slavery issue in Kentucky, the legislature revoked the charter in 1849. By that time, the Kentucky Methodist Conference was firm in its support of Transylvania College in Lexington.⁵⁵⁷ In 1828, the *Holston Messenger* reported that one thousand students were enrolled in Methodist colleges. But early, there were more failures than successes. Fiscal solvency and institutional longevity remained elusive for Methodist higher education.⁵⁵⁸

Early records of the Tennessee Methodist Conference are spotty, but it appears that when the Conference was organized in 1812, there was no committee on education, for there were as yet no schools or thoughts of

⁵⁵⁶ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama and Her People*](#). In 3 volumes. Vol. 1, The American Historical Society, 1927, p. 344; Cohen, Michael David. [*Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 4.

⁵⁵⁷ Rankins, Walter H. [*Augusta College, Augusta, Kentucky. First Established Methodist College 1822-1849*](#). Frankfort, KY: Roberts Printing Company. 1957, pp. 1 -83; Lunger, Irvin E. "Transylvania College, Its History and Its Future". *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (October, 1958), p 312.

⁵⁵⁸ Posey, Walter Brownlow. [*The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783 – 1824*](#). Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933, pp. 70-71; Cummings, Anson Watson. [*The Early Schools of Methodism*](#). New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1886, pp. 424-26.

establishing one. By 1820, there was a bubbling interest in education both in the General Conference and in Tennessee. In that year, the Committee on Missions of the Tennessee Conference recommended : *That the presiding elders of the Tennessee Annual Conference be instructed to make inquiry with respect to the most eligible site for erecting a seminary, and of the most probable means of raising money for its establishment, as also to receive any donations that may be given, conditionally or otherwise, for the purpose, and report to the next Annual Conference.*⁵⁵⁹ This was the first expression of interest in an institution of higher learning in the Tennessee Conference, whose reach extended through the Tennessee Valley in northern Alabama.

The following year, 1821, the Conference again considered the challenge of building an institution of higher learning. On the motion of a young minister, Robert Paine, a committee of three was established to consider the matter, one of whom was delegated to corroborate with the Mississippi Conference on the joint establishment of the college. However, nothing further materialized for the next several years.⁵⁶⁰

Robert Paine. While not of the southern landed gentry, Robert Paine was born into a privileged and educated family, November 12, 1799, in Pearson County North Carolina. His great grandfather, Dr. James Paine, was an educated man, a physician, who emigrated from London, England in 1699 and settled in North Carolina. In Pearson County, his commodious home was the first house constructed of brick. He fathered a son, Robert, who also became a physician and who commanded a company in the Revolutionary War. The grandfather of Robert Paine became a prominent member of the North Carolina legislature after the war. Robert Paine's father, James (1776 – 1840), graduated from the University of North Carolina, one of the first students at the nation's oldest state university. He married Nancy A.



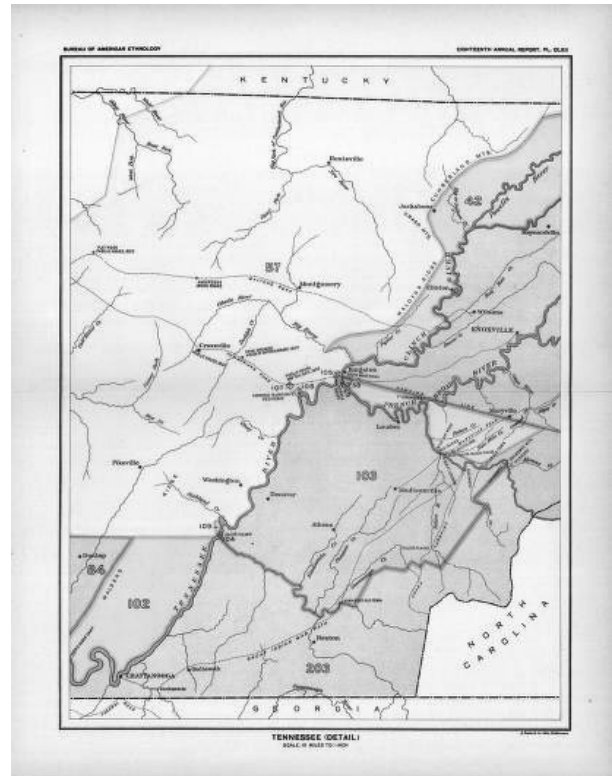
55 Robert Paine, first President of La Grange College.

⁵⁵⁹ Posey, Walter Brownlow. [*The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783 – 1824.*](#) Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933, pp. 70-71.

⁵⁶⁰ Posey, Walter Brownlow. [*The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783 – 1824.*](#) Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933, pp. 70-71.

Williams (1781 – 1815) in 1799, and Robert, their oldest child, was born that year in Person County, North Carolina. James served as clerk of the Court in Pearson County for several years.⁵⁶¹

After acquiring a considerable fortune, the family moved in 1814 to Giles County, Tennessee, a journey of about 600 miles, where James Paine became a planter on the frontier, on lands recently obtained from the Chickasaw. There, James served for a while as a judge of the county court and then for a considerable period as a justice of the peace. James, not surprisingly, embraced education of his many children, but found the opportunities far more limited. Robert Paine was educated as well as the rough schools of the hinterland would permit, and critics of his writing and his public speaking would occasionally remark on its coarseness. Initially, he had attended school in Leasburg, North Carolina, and after the family moved to Giles County, he attended a school near his home some 75 miles north by road from the future site of La Grange College. Paine's biographer adds that the school's headmaster was another North Carolina graduate, William Brown, brother of the future governor of Tennessee, U.S. Congressman and member of Polk's cabinet, A. V. Brown.⁵⁶²



41 Giles County, from the Chickasaw land cession 1805

The young Paine exhibited no clear career plans as a young man, and after his school closed in its first year, he ended up serving as a clerk in a dry

⁵⁶¹ Richard Henderson . [*The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.*](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 23. Robert Paine had 8 brothers and sisters ([WikiTree](#)).

⁵⁶² Richard Henderson . [*The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.*](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, pp. 24-25.

goods store in Pulaski, Tennessee. Electing to continue his studies, he left the mercantile business and in January 1816 re-enrolled at a private school in nearby Lynnville, some 15 miles north of Pulaski. According to his obituary, his professors there included two classical scholars, the Rev. D. C. Weir, and Professor Alexander.⁵⁶³ Availing himself of the instruction accessible in frontier Tennessee, he was said to be a good student, proficient in the classics and determined to improve his facility in mathematics.

Paine's parents were not fervent in their religious practice; but Robert was drawn toward the church as a young man. While a boarder at Weir's school in Pulaski, he took offense at his roommate's declaration of non-belief. Declaring the roommate to be an "infidel" Paine took up lodging elsewhere in Lynnville. On the frontier there were few pastimes, the church serving as one of the few places that young people could congregate after work. For a young shopkeeper and student, unencumbered by the travails of working the land, the church and the revivals or camp meetings of the period offered diversion and opportunity. In his teens, 1817, at the Mount Pisgah Campground, he was heavily influenced Rev. [Thomas L. Douglass](#) and embraced Methodism a few months later.⁵⁶⁴ Douglass would serve as a mentor for the young man in his formative years.

Steadily, he was pulled toward the ministry and, counter to his father's wishes for an enrollment at Cumberland College (which had opened its doors in Nashville in 1806), made the conscious decision to pursue ministerial training.. Licensed to preach in 1818, he soon had his first circuit riding assignments over the Flint River and Tuscaloosa circuits that encompassed much of North Alabama and parts of Mississippi and Tennessee. Life on the circuit was hard and impecunious. To reach the scattered homesteaders in the frontier outback, he rode horseback through dense, unmarked forests, forded swollen streams at risk to his life and that of his mount. A year's salary for Paine was seventy five dollars.⁵⁶⁵ In 1823, he was appointed as a presiding

⁵⁶³ [Paine Family Records](#). Henry Delaven Paine, ed. Vol. 2, No. 9 (January 1883), p. 208. Internet Archive

⁵⁶⁴ John B. M'Ferrin. [History of Methodism in Tennessee. Volume III](#). From the Years 1818 to the Year 1840. Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1873; Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶⁵ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 10; Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary](#):

elder with oversight of the Forked Deer District, extending from Florence, Alabama to the Mississippi River and north to the Kentucky state line. Steadfastly, he progressed from an arduous life as an itinerant preacher in the wilderness of western Alabama, to a ministerial appointment in a prestigious Nashville church, to the presidency of La Grange, and to 36 years' service as the slave-holding Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. From the beginning, Robert Paine would figure in every discussion of the Tennessee Methodist Conference regarding its sponsorship of an institution of higher learning and will figure prominently in the remainder of the narrative.⁵⁶⁶

Robert Paine would marry well. In 1824, he married [Susanna Beck](#) (1809-1836), the daughter of a prominent Nashville attorney, and granddaughter of the Middle Tennessee icon, General James Robertson, considered a founder of that city. Shortly afterwards, at the November 1824 Methodist conference in Columbia, Tennessee, Paine was assigned to Nashville where he enjoyed a successful ministry and was reassigned there at the next conference.⁵⁶⁷ In 1826, the young Paine was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree from the University of Nashville.⁵⁶⁸ Robert and Susanna Paine would have two children before her death at 26 in 1836.⁵⁶⁹

Steps Toward a College: Tennessee Methodist Conference. The Conference committee of three formed In 1821 did not yield immediate results; as late as 1824, one observer reported there was not "a single school of high grade under their control or over which they could exercise any important influence."⁵⁷⁰ In Tennessee, the early successes with education

[Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama.](#)

Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974. Accessible: Internet Archive.

⁵⁶⁶ Derby, George and White, James Terry. [National Cyclopedia of American Biography](#). Vol. 10. New York: James T. White and Company, 1898, pp. 260-262).

⁵⁶⁷ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, pp. 33-35.

⁵⁶⁸ Summers, Thomas Osmond, ed.. [Life and Papers of A. L. P. Green](#). Part 4. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877, p. 154.

⁵⁶⁹ "Susanna Charlotte Beck Paine." [Find a Grave](#). Accessed May 12, 2025. John E. Beck Paine (1827-1851) and James Gardner Paine (1829-1887) were their sons.

⁵⁷⁰ Posey, Walter Brownlow. [The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783 – 1824](#). Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933, p. 71.

were the work of the Presbyterian Church observed another.⁵⁷¹ There were reasons expansion of educational efforts was slow in the Methodist church generally and in the Tennessee Conference specifically. Almost alone on the frontier, the Presbyterian Church required formal classical education for its ministers. Too, for the most part, the frontiersmen adhering to the Methodist faith were often poor with few resources to direct toward higher education. There was also, among the faithful, a zealotry or resistance to the notion of learning or instruction on the Sabbath, that had inhibited the introduction Sunday School instruction into the American Methodist Church. Indeed, that opposition was still fuming in 1822 in Nashville itself, where one Sunday morning affixed to the doors of a Methodist Church there was the declaration, scribbled on cardboard, that there would be “No desecration of the holy Sabbath, by teaching on the Sabbath in this church.” Resolutely, Thomas Maddin and other progressive ministers in the city, worked to turn the tide in the city.⁵⁷²

The interest of the Tennessee Methodist Conference in sponsoring a college under its purview re-emerged at its annual meeting in Nashville, November 1826. There a standing committee was appointed to consider the creation of a college under the Conference’s patronage that would be neither “religious or theological.” According to David Bronson Potts in his book on Wesleyan University, denominational colleges of the period generally tried to avoid the stigma of sectarianism. Like Wesleyan, LaGrange College and others stipulated that religious affiliation would not be a factor in admission and no “religious test” would be employed in the selection of the president or faculty. Courses at denominational colleges seldom included courses on theology.⁵⁷³ Indeed, during its history, there would be no theological curriculum or theological professorships at La Grange.⁵⁷⁴

Among the members of the committee were names that would be closely linked to the emergent La Grange College: William McMahon,

⁵⁷¹ Paschall, Edwin. [*Old Times or Tennessee History for Tennessee Boys and Girls. In Three Books. Nashville:*](#) Published by the Author. 1869, p. 292.

⁵⁷² Posey, Walter Brownlow. [*The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest, 1783 – 1824.*](#) Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933, p. 72, p. 77.

⁵⁷³ Potts, David. [*Wesleyan University 1931-1910. Collegiate enterprise in New England.*](#) New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 15.

⁵⁷⁴ James W. Lee, Naphtali Luccock, and James Main Dixon. [*Illustrated History of Methodism. The Story of the Origin and Progress of the Methodist Church from its Foundation by John Wesley to the Present Day.*](#) St. Louis: The Methodist Magazine Publishing Company, 1900, p. 512.

Alexander Sale, Turner Saunders and Robert Paine. Both Turner Saunders and Alexander Sale were Methodist ministers in the immediate region of the college's future location. Saunders would become chair of the La Grange Board of Trustees. Robert Paine, his soon-to-be son-in-law, became its first President. Sale's son John would attend the college; William McMahon would distinguish himself with his fund-raising efforts on its behalf. Lewis Garrett; William McNeil; Paine's mentor Thomas Douglass, James L. Armstrong, James Frazier and Joseph T. Elliston completed the committee.⁵⁷⁵

In the Tennessee Valley and across the maturing frontier, the advocacy for higher education was being heard in more quarters. For some, it was the need to have available a more affordable alternative to sending their children east for college. Persistently, the Tennessee Conference nudged forward the idea of a college. For others, there was a hostility toward the *values* in the eastern colleges, particularly the contrast between a more urban, industrial and educated population of the north and the rural, agricultural economy of the south, that as a matter of public policy required a majority of its labor force be maintained in state of illiteracy.⁵⁷⁶ Meeting in Tuscumbia, Alabama in November 1827, the Methodist committee was again urged to move forward developing ideas for the location of the college and securing fiscal support. In time, the future site of the college would prove to be only eleven miles away from the meeting location.⁵⁷⁷

Steadily the idea evolved that education was necessary for the southern frontier to progress. The idea gained momentum and support. A college would provide an planter, shopkeepers, attorneys, and physicians – those with some disposable income but most of whom could not afford to

⁵⁷⁵ Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, n. p.; Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 428.

⁵⁷⁶ Granade, Samuel Ray. [Higher Education in Antebellum Alabama](#). Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1972, p. 11; W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 429. John Lytle, John M. Taylor, and H. R. W. Hill were new members of the committee, replacing McNeil, Armstrong and Frazier.

send their sons to eastern insititutions—access to higher education.⁵⁷⁸ Cotton planters in the area of Tuscumbia, Leighton, Courtland, many of whom had summer homes on the heights of Lawrence Hill nearby, sent a delegation to consult with the committee about the prospects of locating the Methodist college there.⁵⁷⁹ At the annual conference assembly on December 4, 1828, the committee informed attendees that a grant of land and a subscription that amounted to ten thousand dollars had been offered for the Methodists to locate their college on the mountain. There were no competing proposals from elsewhere.⁵⁸⁰ By resolution, the Conference readily endorsed the recommendation of locating the college at La Grange. A new committee was appointed to secure the site and the funds and to bring the college into operation. William McMahan was dispatched to Mississippi's December 25th annual Conference in Tuscaloosa to invite its participation in the endeavor. Enthusiastically, the Conference agreed to cooperate. Eventually, MaMahon would later reach out to the more established Georgia Conference, receiving a little money and some cooperation from that state as well.⁵⁸¹

From the 1827 Tennessee Conference committee, William McMahan, Turner Saunders Robert Paine, Alexander Sale, and Lewis Garrett were joined by James McFerrin, John M. Holland, Francis A. Owen, John Southerland, John M. Taylor, Thomas Preston, Weston T. Rucker, Henry S. Foote, Hartwell King, John J. Winston, and Moses Hall as the commissioners to bring the college into place. Mississippi appointed seven members to work jointly with

⁵⁷⁸ W. L. McDonald. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁹ Nina Leftwich. [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times*](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 125-126.

⁵⁸⁰ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, pp. 429-31; Lazenby, Marion Elias. [*History of Methodism in Alabama and West Florida. Being an Account of the Amazing March of Methodism through Alabama and West Florida*](#). Parthenon Press, 1960, p. 147; Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, vol. II (1957), p. 10.

⁵⁸¹ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 429, p. 443; Lazenby, Marion Elias. [*History of Methodism in Alabama and West Florida. Being an Account of the Amazing March of Methodism through Alabama and West Florida*](#). Parthenon Press, 1960, p. 147; Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, p. 10.

the Tennessee Conference: R. L. Kennon, Joseph McDowell, Thomas Ledbetter, Ebenezer Hearn, Thomas Owens, William Spruill and Alexander Talley. (More about the latter member later).⁵⁸² In December 1829, the constitution of the college was drafted by the conference. McMahon was appointed agent, and his efforts yielded about \$3,000 from the meager resources of the conference preachers and their followers.⁵⁸³

The chosen remote site up on Lawrence Hill, initially accepted as the ideal location, would prove to be a poor strategic choice. The mountain was remote and remained so during the life of the institution, with little local population or patronage, and the endowment from the initial supporters was insufficient, requiring strenuous, unremitting effort on the part of the church to sustain it.⁵⁸⁴ The geography of the state itself worked against the success of La Grange College. The highland spur of the Cumberland mountains upon which the institution was situated was part of an east – west barrier that separated north from south, and the broad Tennessee River winded its ways slowly northwards, before turning first into the Ohio River and then the Mississippi. The planters of the Tennessee Valley found themselves isolated in many ways, and for more commercially aligned with New Orleans than Mobile.⁵⁸⁵ Yet, to the extent that alternatives existed initially, the site reflected the sentiments of the times, a prevailing English idea embracing a predilection for isolation, a removal from urban vice and

⁵⁸² Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 429; Lazenby, Marion Elias. [*History of Methodism in Alabama and West Florida. Being an Account of the Amazing March of Methodism through Alabama and West Florida*](#). Parthenon Press, 1960, p. 147; Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. "Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College" by James Edmonds Saunders, pp. 164-171

⁵⁸³ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 451.

⁵⁸⁴ James W. Lee, Naphtali Luccock, and James Main Dixon. [*Illustrated History of Methodism. The Story of the Origin and Progress of the Methodist Church from its Foundation by John Wesley to the Present Day*](#). St. Louis: The Methodist Magazine Publishing Company, 1900, p. 512; Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. "Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders," p. 187.

⁵⁸⁵ Albert Burton Moore. [*History of Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa AL: University Supply Store. 1951; p. 300.

temptation.⁵⁸⁶ “The secluded position of the College,” intoned the commissioners, “seems in no small degree to sanction the hope that the enticements to dissipation and idleness, which are too frequently observed to assemble themselves in the vicinity of institutions of this kind, will not dare exhibit themselves here.”⁵⁸⁷

La Grange College was chartered by the Alabama legislature on January 19, 1830, a few days after the first students arrived on campus. La Grange was the state’s first chartered college. The *La Grange College Act* provided for 50 trustees, authorized a preparatory school to enable potential students to meet the rigorous entry requirements, and empowered the conferral of degrees. It was to be “purely literary, scientific, and undenominational” and was “prohibited from the adoption of any system of education which shall provide for the inculcation of the peculiar tenets or doctrines of any religious denomination whatever.”⁵⁸⁸ An initial gambit on the part of the Methodists to include a school or asylum for the state’s “deaf and dumb” which might have enhanced its fiscal viability was not approved by the legislature.⁵⁸⁹

When the students arrived at La Grange on January 9, 1830, almost one year after site selection, the campus was in disarray. Robert Paine recalls, on that first day, mounting his horse for the frigid ride from Tusculumbia to La Grange. The temperature was below freezing, and there was a light snow in the valley. The sun gleaming off Lawrence Mountain made it appear to Paine like an iceberg. Both he and the horse experienced significant discomfort on the 15 mile trek. Clambering up the mountain on the rough path, he paused at the summit to view the valley below. Hundreds

⁵⁸⁶Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 72.

⁵⁸⁷ Anson West. *A History of Methodism in Alabama*. Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 431.

⁵⁸⁸ Stephen B. Weeks. *Public School Education in Alabama*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 19; Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 65; Pickett, Albert James. *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*. Vol. 1. 2nd Ed. Charleston: Walker and James, 1851, p. 681

⁵⁸⁹ Harry V. Barnard. “*La Grange College: A Historical Sketch*.” *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, Vol. II (1957), p. 10; Walter B. Posey, “*La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College*.” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 17; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. *History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography*. Vol. 2, 1921, p. 837.

of dwellings curled the smoke of morning fires skyward, and he could see the fenced enclosures of the farms and plantations. The steaming fog rising off the Tennessee River outlined its course in the distance. He recalls the frozen tears in his eyes as he left Nashville and his life of Methodist itineracy behind, and trotted deliberately onto the isolated campus.⁵⁹⁰

Unhappily, as he rode onto the grounds, the first brick building on the campus was unready. The building was been said to reflect the architectural vision of [George Gilliam Steele](#), of Huntsville, whose designs were prominent among public buildings there. One of the planters, in the La Grange area for only a short time, [William Haywood Lawrence](#), may have actually been responsible for its actual construction — perhaps as his contribution to securing the Methodist nod. A North Carolinian who settled in the region, Lawrence and his family moved to Tuscaloosa by 1836.⁵⁹¹ But on this January 9 morning, Paine found little preparation for the start of school. Over a hundred students were present and milling about, but few campus staff were present. The steward, whom Paine recalls as male, but was probably Mrs. Edie Harris, was scrambling to feed and find housing for the students. A few local trustees, at the urging of the trustees, were there to lend a hand. But the little village was unprepared for the surge. Paine found the number of rooms to be insufficient and substandard. Beds, mattresses, furnishings for the boarding house rooms or Steele's dormitory rooms were not available. Worse, the dormitory was unfinished. Only one room in the entire building had yet had a hearth laid; and the craftsman who had been secured to have furnishings and fireplaces ready for the start of school found it too cold to actually work! Predictably, the chilled and frustrated students and the harried volunteers directed their frustration at the newly arrived president, the trustees and the largely absent faculty.⁵⁹² In his memoirs, Paine gruffly

⁵⁹⁰ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama](#). Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 62. Accessible: Internet Archive.

⁵⁹¹ Linda Bayer, "[George Steele: Huntsville's Antebellum Architect](#)". *The Huntsville Historic Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1979), pp. 2-22. W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1019.

⁵⁹² Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 433; Harry

rejected any responsibility for the conditions on campus, asserting that the trustees named by the conferences (and formally approved by the Alabama legislature a few days after the school opened) had failed to execute their responsibilities. With the primary edifice incomplete, and the scattered private homes offering as best as possible the solutions of steward hall and lodging. The few willing souls on site, he recalled, “were too busy to give it their attention, or did not know hat or how to do what would be needed.”⁵⁹³

La Grange Campus.

The site selected for the campus adjoined the hamlet of La Grange. Until 1857, the La Grange campus would consist of but two buildings. When both were finally in place, each had 24 dormitory rooms. The first and main building was made of brick, and had three levels and a basement. In addition to the dorm rooms, it featured the college chapel, President Paine’s office, two halls for classes and rooms for the literary societies. The building was set on a limestone foundation and had four large columns that defined its frontal aspect. The second building would appear two years after the college opened. Also made of brick, the 24 new dormitory rooms featured fireplaces from the beginning. With its 48 dormitory rooms, La Grange College could house 150 students. In those early years, commencement activities and graduation were held in the La Grange Baptist Church.⁵⁹⁴

Thomas Hobbs shared room nine with his suitemates in 1844. He began his day with the first morning bell, washing face and hands in the basin, struggling into his clothes and heading off to chapel before the second morning bell and roll call. The morning shave might be postponed if there was insufficient time to reach chapel before roll call and avoid a demerit. From a wealthy Athens, Alabama family, Hobbs busied himself with the décor of his room he shared with Pres Keyes, purchasing pictures from a traveling peddler to hang on his walls. Among his choices were a picture,

V. Barnard. “[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#).” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, np. 10.

Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama](#). Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 63. Accessible: Internet Archive.

⁵⁹³ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama](#). Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 62. Accessible: Internet Archive.

⁵⁹⁴ Posey, Walter B. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#),” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933),p. 6.

“The Sailor’s Return,” a copy of the *Declaration of Independence*, and a poster depicting the condition of indentured servants in England and the lives of plantation slaves in the United States. Hobbs took his meals not in the steward’s hall, but at the home of faculty member Henry r.⁵⁹⁵

From the outset, the lives of La Grange students were closely supervised; three faculty dined with them and lodged in the dormitories. Absences from class, from the dormitory rooms after hours, and from recitations and chapel were noted. Demerits were read aloud weekly to the the entire student body and along with grade reports, parents were notified about behavior and deportmant issues at the conclusion of each term. La Grange College policy encouraged an austere lifestyle, and parents were encouraged to deny their boys open accounts at local establishments or to give them very large allowances. One faculty member would serve as the purser for the students and would receive and account for their money. Eventually the sale of liquor within 3 miles of the college was enjoined by legislative act.⁵⁹⁶

The official day would end with evening prayer. Sunday church attendance was mandatory and there were prayer services twice a day during the week. While, strictly speaking, there were no theological courses, students did have to take “Moral Science” and “Evidence of Christianity.” Indeed, it was likely in the former class where President Paine would justify enslavement to his students.⁵⁹⁷

The two college buildings were about 150 yards north of the Steward’s Hall.⁵⁹⁸ One of the early students and later faculty member at La Grange, A.

⁵⁹⁵ Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), pp. 63 -76; [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976

⁵⁹⁶ Posey, Walter B. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College.](#)” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), pp. 6-11; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 1-12.

⁵⁹⁷ Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), pp. 63 -76; McDonald, W. L. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.*](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9; [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976.

⁵⁹⁸ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 10.

A. McGregor, recalls the college dining hall reflected sound craftsmanship, with a basement of brick and floors above of pine planking. In addition to the large dining room, there were two side rooms that served as pantries, and there was an ironing room in the basement. On the second level there were four large rooms and a wide dividing corridor, and above that were two large rooms that were effectively bunk rooms for boarders, supplementing the capacity of the other two buildings. In sequential order, from the founding of the college to its closing, the stewards in charge of the hall were Elizabeth (Edie) Harris, Nathan Gregg, Drury Mayes (1808 – 1856), Thaddeus William Felton (1817 -1877), [Dr. J. S. Napier](#) (1807 – 1889), Susan F. Saltzer (1823 – 1901) and Dr. A. W. Bentley.⁵⁹⁹ The steward typically maintained the boarding quarters in good order, and was present in the hall during meals, ensuring proper deportment among the student diners. Meals were served at the same time of day and students were called to the tables by the ringing of a bell where they would remain standing until the steward had delivered grace.⁶⁰⁰ The stewards were generally held in high regard by the students, and their menus were carefully prepared and appreciated. McGregor recalls that [Martha Burchet King Felton](#) (1818 -1904) was particularly solicitous of student welfare during her husband's oversight of the hall and would often mother them through their illnesses. Napier owned a vast plantation of several thousand acres in Colbert County, and from his farm kept the mess hall well supplied in fruits and vegetables.⁶⁰¹

By practice, the sons of the stewards were accorded admission to La Grange and many attended or graduated from there, including four of the Gregg sons: John Gregg (1828 – 1864) and James William Gregg (1825 – 1860) graduated in 1847. Nathan (1832 – 1850) received his degree in the year of his death. Edward Pearsall Gregg (1833 – 1894) attended but did not graduate.⁶⁰² Two of Drury Mayes' sons, John (1852) and William M. (1856) graduated from La Grange, and Joel attended but did not graduate.⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 9 “; [T.W. Felton](#).” *Alabama Department of Archives and History*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025.

⁶⁰⁰ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 35.

⁶⁰¹ “[Dr. John Smith Napier](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 12, 2025.

⁶⁰² “[Nathan Gregg, Jr.](#)” *Find A Grave*, Online. Accessed July 11, 2025; “[Colonel Edward Pearsall Gregg](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025; “[James William Gregg](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025; “[John Gregg](#),” *Geni*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025.

⁶⁰³ “[John Summerfield Mays](#).” *Family Search*. Online. Accessed July 12, 2025. John (1832 -1865) had two brothers were William F. (1837 -) and Joel F. (1939 -). There were 3 sisters: Penelope,

William and John became successful physicians, the former serving in the 16th Alabama Regiment as a medical officer, making it through the war and dying in Courtland in 1868. John died during the war in Jasper, Alabama. Joel also joined the 16th Alabama and was one of the many casualties at Shiloh in 1862.⁶⁰⁴

Thaddeus and Martha Felton's son, Thaddeus, Jr., graduated in 1861, one of the two cadets to receive a diploma from the transformed La Grange Military Academy before the outbreak of war. The other was the son of Thaddeus' successor as steward, Dr. John Smith Napier, who operated the mess hall in 1856 and 1857. Thaddeus Jr. joined the 35th Alabama Regiment, and became captain of Company B. Napier's son of the same name served capably in the confederate infantry during the war, dying in Texas in 1914. The biographies of these young men provide insight into the role of La Grange in the American South and will be shared later.⁶⁰⁵

Susan Saltzer managed the mess hall during most of the last years of its existence, in its instantiation as the La Grange Military Academy during Major Robertson's tenure, 1858-1860. Little is known of her. Adjacent to the miniscule commercial strip in the center of La Grange was the dwelling known to chronicler McGregor and others as the "Saltzer home," managed as a boarding house by Jonathan Saltzer. It is known that Susan was married, and it could have been their home for a while. And it is possible that Jonathan had died before she took the job as steward, for McGregor suggests she lived with the Frank Belue family during the time of her employment at the college. She ultimately adopted the daughter of the Belues, Elizabeth, and they lived in Tuscumbia until Susan's death in 1901. It is said that during Robertson's rigorous tenure, the mess hall functioned smoothly.⁶⁰⁶

The tenure of the final steward, Dr. Alexander Willis Bentley (1811 – 1868), is sufficient to illustrate that mess hall fare was not uniformly appreciated by the student diners. His time at the Military Academy

Martha and Elizabeth. Their father was [Drury Mayes](#) (1808 -1856), and their mother was [Martha Ann McGregor Mayes](#) (1813-1894).

⁶⁰⁴ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 35.

⁶⁰⁵ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 36. Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, {and} La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 158-159.; "[Dr. John Smith Napier.](#)" *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 13, 2025.

⁶⁰⁶ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 6, p. 36; "[Susan T. Saltzer.](#)" *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 12, 2025. (Susan's tombstone yields no record of her ties to Jonathan Saltzer or the Belues).

coincided with the infamous “goose rebellion” chronicled by one of the more illustrious attendees of La Grange, Dr. John Alan Wyeth. The geese will be visited later.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁷ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857.*](#) New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 53; “Dr [Alexander Willis Bentley](#).” *Find a Grave*. Accessed July 12, 2025.

Chapter 6

Faculty of LaGrange College

One of the first duties of the joint Tennessee/Mississippi joint committee, was to assemble a faculty for their new college. Robert Paine, active in the discussions from the beginning was named the first President, although initially he modestly insisted on the title of Superintendent.⁶⁰⁸ Determined to sustain his ties to the pulpit, Paine was also assigned Methodist Church in Tuscumbia, where for his first year he preached to that congregation. In addition to those duties, he shouldered the teaching roles of moral philosophy and letters. [William Wilson Hudson](#) (1808-1859), a graduate of Yale, accepted appointment as professor of mathematics and modern languages. In something of a fortuitous find, [Edward Dromgoole Sims](#) ably stepped over from principalship of the male preparatory school on the mountain to fill the role of professor of ancient languages.⁶⁰⁹

As the three faculty met with the boys planning to enroll in the college, they found to their dismay that “the large majority were sadly wanting for any regular College class.”⁶¹⁰ A few had been studying at other colleges, and took the opportunity to enroll closer to home; others had

⁶⁰⁸ Paine was appointed at the Tennessee Annual Conference in Huntsville, Alabama in November 1829: , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 40

⁶⁰⁹ Harry E. Wallace. [*History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*](#). A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily* February 25, 1999 and accessible via Rootsweb (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~allauder/historyshoals1.htm>). Accessed May 28, 2025; Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*. Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 61. Here, in his memoirs, Paine insists that he reached an understanding with the conference that his commitment would be for only one year; that he would not sell his possessions in Nashville but would get the affairs of the college in order and then resign and resume his regular responsibilities in the city. Additionally, he avers (p. 61) that he would tender his resignation three times through the years.

⁶¹⁰ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*. Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 63.

profited from a period of instruction under Sims at the preparatory academy. But most of those who had answered the “flaming advertisements” placed by the trustees were wholly unready to meet the stern curriculum of the new college. Paine, Sims and Hudson were able to find a suitable tutor in the area to assume the preparatory role served by the preparatory school who, with their help, was able “to meet the exigency of the case.”⁶¹¹ Certainly, instruction in the classic curriculum offered by La Grange, mirroring the instruction at North Carolina, Virginia and Yale, would be inaccessible to most frontier students fortunate enough to find skilled itinerant teachers. Admission was rigorous, with students having to translate chapters of Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, exhibit literacy by reading for Felton’s or Jacob’s *Greek Reader* as well as Xenophon’s *Anabasis*.⁶¹² The requirements were analogous to those in the established colleges of the seacoast states, such as Yale and Virginia.⁶¹³ Lacking was the student population able to meet those requirements and the undergirding educational infrastructure required to produce them.

The economics of scale and church policy presented challenges to the young college from the beginning. By March, 70 students were enrolled, and the preparatory pipeline offered prospects of another 30 in the wings. The first session closed June 11. The second session commenced July 12, closing November 12. Tuition was 20 dollars for a two session school year of ten months. Board ran students 8 dollars a month, or 80 dollars for the school year. Incidental expenses of some four dollars were estimated to bring the total for college-going to \$104 annually.⁶¹⁴ “Board” included

⁶¹¹ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*. Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, pp. 62-63.

⁶¹² Harry V. Barnard. [“La Grange College: A Historical Sketch.”](#) *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society; Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily* February 25, 1999 and accessible via Rootsweb (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~allauder/historyshoals1.htm>). Accessed May 28, 2025. A similar admission requirement was in place at the University of Alabama, and a similar gulf in student preparation was encountered: James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama. Vol. 1, 1818-1902](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 155.

⁶¹³ Baldwin, Ebenezer. [History of Yale College: From Its Foundation, A. D. 1700 to the Year 1838](#). New Haven: Benjamin and William Noyes, 1841.

⁶¹⁴ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 433, p. 452.

student meals, bedding, laundry, and firewood. By 1852, tuition was \$25 per session, with board running to \$45 per term and laundry and additional \$5. A junior year chemistry charge of \$5 was also applied. Firewood and candles had been dropped from the board fees by 1840 and became a student responsibility. However, while La Grange foreswore a theological curriculum, many turned to the college for their ministerial preparation. According to policy, students prepared for the ministry and sons of itinerant minister in the Tennessee Conference, Alabama Conference (formed 1832) and Memphis Conference (formed 1840) were not required to pay tuition.⁶¹⁵ With its limited enrollment, La Grange began life with barely sufficient funds to sustain it, and during the first year's operation, Robert Paine posted appeals (April 23, 1830, June 3, 1830) in the *Christian Advocate* for additional support from Methodists. Without additional funding, said the president, La Grange College "must go down."⁶¹⁶ During its first year, in contrast to the facilities soon to be available at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, La Grange operated without scientific apparatus or library.⁶¹⁷ Nevertheless, the first report from La Grange trustees to the Methodist Conference was a glowing "all well" filled with optimistic prospects for the institution. Robert Paine was reappointed for a second year, still under the title of Superintendent and William McMahon was appointed as the college agent.⁶¹⁸

Slaves at La Grange.

There do not appear to be as many slaves involved in the daily operations of La Grange as there were at the University of Alabama which would open in 1831. On the one hand, there was still an awkwardness between the Methodist Church, ownership of slaves by some of its ministers, and the full embrace of slavery – although there was accommodation of the practice at every turn. And on the other, La Grange simply could not afford to rent the labor of many enslaved people at a time.

⁶¹⁵ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 10.

⁶¹⁶ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 17.

⁶¹⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 452.

⁶¹⁸ McFerrin, John B. [History of Methodism in Tennessee, Vol. III](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church South, 1895, p. 374.

Yet, slaves were present on campus, performing a limited number of roles for the students.

Jim Sledge was in fact a slave held by a future La Grange College President, Dr. Wadsworth. He served as janitor of the college from 1850 to 1858. The surname Sledge likely indicates he was at some point the enslaved possession of Alexander Sledge or other members of that family. In 1850, Mary Winifred Sledge married Dr. Wadsworth; perhaps Jim came with the bride. Each morning, at sunrise, by ringing the college bell, Jim announced classes were in session. When the college later moved itself by wagon to Florence, McGregor reports Jim remained behind on the mountain. In 1858, when he stepped away from the janitorial role, a change was made, and the start of the school day was announced by the beating of drums. Jim Sledge was also a preacher and at the end of his life, around 1903, he was a member of the African American Church in Selma. He was a slave no more.⁶¹⁹

Jim King was the enslaved property of Robert King, Sr. He assumed janitorial duties at the college upon the arrival of Major J. W. Robertson as head of the La Grange Military Academy. Bringing a stern measure of discipline, Robertson required the cadets to obtain their own water and to maintain order in their dorm rooms. Jim's role was to maintain the offices and the recitation rooms. He was also the academy's drummer, keeping time at the head of the cadet's marching column with his crisp drumbeat. Jim King left the area after emancipation.⁶²⁰

Gus Robertson was brought from Marietta to La Grange by the major. In addition to making mattresses for the cadet's rooms, he joined Jim on the bass drum. He returned to Georgia after the close of the school. **Dan Robertson** was a slave hired from other slaveholders on the mountain by Major Robertson during his tenure. Dan Robertson performed the role of fifer for the marching cadets, in addition to serving as the college tailor. He was also said to be a virtuoso on the guitar. Dan lived in Courtland after the war and remarkably attended the mountain reunion of the alumni in

⁶¹⁹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 37.

⁶²⁰ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 37.

1904, where he was presented with a badge commemorating his years of involuntary servitude.⁶²¹

In contrast, slavery was a prominent feature of the operation of the University of Alabama, which would open in the state capital in 1831. Oran Roberts, an early enrollee at the university, would be accompanied by his slave, Prince. Roberts' father had recently died, and Prince was sent from the family piedmont farmland to perform labor that would pay for Roberts' tuition and board.⁶²² For Roberts, the future governor of Texas, slavery was the enabler of all that became possible in his life, and he was an unapologetic defender of the institution in his public years leading up to the civil war. As one biographer notes, "his motive was more than just an expression of a political philosophy; slavery had kept him alive and laid the foundation for his future success."⁶²³

The Village of La Grange.

It was commonplace in the early nineteenth century, when the causes of mosquito borne diseases were not understood, for wealthy slaveholding planters cultivating large swaths of canebreak and bottom land, to gather in the hottest months on elevated, well-watered, cooler locations. Where they gathered in sufficient number, they would together construct elements of an organized society featuring summer homes, churches, schools and academies.

The rather affluent, and often part-time inhabitants who lived on Lawrence's Hill, had already demonstrated their determination to educate their children. In 1824, Edward Dromgoole Sims, son of an affluent Virginia family, and graduate of the University of North Carolina, was schoolmaster of a school for young men there. A remarkable scholar, he would secure standing as a premier scholar of the Anglo-Saxon language, and would serve as a professor at La Grange College, Randolph Macon, and the

⁶²¹ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857.*](#) New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 37.

⁶²² Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836.* Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892.

⁶²³ Yancey, William C. [*The Old Alcade: Oran Milo Roberts, Texas' Forgotten Fire-eater.*](#) Ph. D. Thesis. Denton: University of North Texas, 2016, p.14.

University of Alabama.⁶²⁴ A prominent feature of the tiny village of La Grange was the LaFayette Female Academy, a commodious two story brick building erected in 1825 and named for the famous French general who at that time was on an extended visit to the state of Alabama. In 1825, Connecticut native and Baptist minister, [Dr. Daniel Perrin Bestor](#) (1797-1869) had opened the preparatory school for young women. Bestor, one of the most interesting men on the mountain, was also a planter, something of a philosopher and entrepreneur. Before finding his way to La Grange, he had been instrumental in the founding in 1821 of the rigorous [Athens Female Academy](#), serving as head of school there. Bestor was open to the question of the evils of the slave economy that undergirded the cotton plantations of the region, and was active in the American Colonization Society movement that would be established at La Grange.⁶²⁵ The academy began its first term in January 1826, initially superintended by Mr. and Mrs. Hall. Bestor assumed its presidency in the Fall of that year; he would oversee LaFayette Academy until 1835.⁶²⁶ The academy would be a vital part of La Grange until the federal army torched the mountain in 1863. Indeed, a boarding house for women students was constructed adjacent to the school in 1856.⁶²⁷ Until the arrival of the Methodist college, the Baptists largely dominated affairs on the mountain, with Bestor and John Townes the prominent leaders.⁶²⁸

Fittingly, another brick building in the village was the Baptist church, constructed on property that had been awarded by the government to

⁶²⁴ [The Sims Family Genealogy](#). Online. Accessed April 24, 2025; Anson West. *A History of Methodism in Alabama*. Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 449.

⁶²⁵ W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2; Dylan Tucker, University of North Alabama, ["Athens Female Academy / Athens State University," Omeka at Auburn](#), accessed April 24, 2025; Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 18.

⁶²⁶ Nina Leftwich. 1850: [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tusculumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 125; W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 4; Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 18; W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2.

⁶²⁷ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 4.

⁶²⁸ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 15.

the trustees of LaFayette Women's Academy. Bestor would leave La Grange for Greensboro in 1833, where he would establish another school for females. Later Bestor, would operate a plantation in Columbus, Mississippi while ministering churches in Mobile and Columbus. He served on the Board of Trustees of La Grange's counterpart of the era, the University of Alabama, and was a close colleague of its second president, Dr. Manly.⁶²⁹ Bestor's church, site of many La Grange College graduations, would be sold to the Methodists in 1851.⁶³⁰

In 1847, the new doctor on the mountain was [George Ernst Kumpe](#) (1819 – 1887). Dr. Kumpe, born in Germany and educated there, moved with his brother John to the Tennessee Valley, initially to Tusculum. In his first year on the mountain, he married Rebecca Frances Kennerly, whose father and mother, Major James and Rebecca Kennerly, lived on the mountain. The Kennerly home, made of brick, was the original Masonic Lodge in La Grange having been converted into a residence, around 1835. With the marriage it became home to George and Rebecca. He was popular among the populace, serving the valley from horseback, practicing there for almost thirty years before moving to Little Rock. He later returned to Leighton, where he died in 1887. While in La Grange, he served as President of the State Medical Association. An avid Mason, he led a revived Masonic group there on the mountain as well as in Leighton upon his return from Little Rock. Throughout his time at La Grange, Kumpe was a close friend of the faculty at the college: Paine, Tutwiler, Wadsworth, and Hardy.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ Rev. Josephus Shackelford. [History of the Muscle Shoals Baptist Association From 1820 to 1890, a Period of 70 Years. With a History of the Churches of the Same and a Biographical Sketch of its Ministers. Also a Short Sketch of the General Baptist History by Rev. Matthew Lyon.](#) Tr: Published by the Author, 1891, pp. 225-230. For more information about Bestor, see Arthur E. Bestor, Jr. "[Letters from a Southern Opponent of Sectionalism.](#)" *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February 1946), pp. 106-122. Two of his sons died fighting for the Confederacy. His brother's son, Orson, who became a Baptist minister after the war, fought for the Union.

⁶³⁰ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 15; Walter B. Posey. La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College. *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 6.

⁶³¹ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical. Illustrated.](#) Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 106; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 5 – 7. (A letter from the Grand Secretary of the Alabama Masons, George A. Beauchamp, indicated the lodge had likely ceased to exist in 1835); Thomas McAdory Owen. [History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography.](#) In Four Volumes. Volume III. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company. 1921, p. 995; "[Dr. George E. Kumpe](#)" *Colbert County Alabama Biographies*. Online. Accessed 13 July, 2025.

Among the shops on the main street of the hamlet of La Grange were drygoods shops operated by William Fort and Thaddeus W. Felton. The Feltons occupied the Brody House during their time in La Grange. After Thaddeus' death, Martha Felton continued to take in boarders, and do washing for the students. She also rented out her slaves for additional income. In the brief time of the La Grange Military Academy, the primary store owner was John Aycock. Elliot Stephenson maintained a woodworking shop in the area. Also, on the north side of the streets there were two shoe shops that served the students and the village, James Crittenden and McKinney & Mourland. The former subsequently moved his shop to Florence where he enjoyed considerable success. At some point, Peter McKinney reportedly crushed his partner's skull with a shoemaker's implement, killing him, and then leaving La Grange without being prosecuted. A storehouse that was used by Drs. Kumpe and Napier was also on the little business strip.⁶³²

Not far from the Kumpe home was the La Grange [Cemetery](#). One of the subsequent presidents of the college, James Hardy is buried there, his grave initially marked with large fossils of ancient flora gathered by his students in 1853. Interred there is Amanda Shaw Paine, the second wife of Robert Paine, as well as the second wife of President Edward Wadsworth and his only daughter. Others buried there include the Ricks, Jones, Feltons, Maddens, Forts, and DeGraffenreids. Some portions of the cemetery remain intact today.⁶³³

In towns, villages and hamlets of the period, common practice was to attribute to a dwelling the name of its first or most prominent occupant. Such was the case in La Grange. South of the cemetery the two story stood the deGraffenreid home of red brick. It is probable that the home belonged to Abraham (or Abram) Maury deGraffenreid (1784 – 1859) who was among a dozen families that moved in 1819 the 120 miles from Franklin, Tennessee to the new lands for sale in Lawrence County, Alabama. His

⁶³² McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 5 – 7;p. 29. "[Many Legends After Dark Haunted Hayride](#)." *Courier Journal*, October 6, 2020. Online. Accessed July 13, 2025.

⁶³³ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p.82; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 8-9; James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 233.

acreage was in sight of the Saunders' home on Rocky Hill, and he became a wealthy planter and Justice of the Peace. While from a noble Swiss family, he also fit readily into the rugged frontier life of the Alabama hills. At a BBQ in the Valley, deGraffenreid was slapped in the face by a combative attendee. Drawing the saber from inside his walking cane, deGraffenreid ran his assailant through, leaving him for dead. To the latter's great fortune, no vitals were pierced and he recovered. In time however, Abraham's own health failed and he moved his family to LaGrange where a boarding house on the Byler Road ensured a means of family income during his infirmity. Tignal Jones, Mary Fennel, and F. C. Vinson would occupy the home after his death.⁶³⁴

Not far away was the DeLoney home. In order to educate his family, wealthy planter Edward Brodnax Walker Deloney (1786 - 1858) and his wife Margaret Bonner Fox raised their family in La Grange. Of the six children, Issac Fox, Turner and LaFayette attended LaGrange.⁶³⁵ William Woods Downs (1802 -1882) and his wife Henrietta lived there at another time lived there, and his son John Wesley Downs graduated from La Grange with First Honors. Downs moved to Texas in 1854. John Wesley died in Texas as well. Other homes in the village at times belonged to the Crittendens, Prince, Sledge, Davis, and Aycok. The Robert Paine house was east of the Davis place, living there with his family during the years. Of his presidency. Subsequently Dr. Edward Wadsworth lived there after Paine's departure, and Elizabeth Felton then lived there until it was destroyed by fire in 1872.⁶³⁶

To the west was a ravine through which ran a strong stream. In addition to serving the resident's needs, the stream functioned as Bestor's baptistery. Connected to the stream was a stone house where milk and fresh meats were stored. A large cistern collected water for cooking, washing, bathing, and watering of stock. Bathing at the cistern after the citizens of the mountain were in bed was a common student practice. As one author recollected: "The boy receiving the bath stood on a flat rock near the spring and one or two mates filling their buckets with the cold

⁶³⁴ deGraffenreid, Thomas P. [*History of the deGraffenreid Family*](#). New York: Published by the author, 1925; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 7.

⁶³⁵ "[Edward Walker Deloney](#)", *Wiki Tree*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025; A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p.8.

⁶³⁶ "[William Wood Downs](#)" *Wiki Tree*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025; "[John Wesley Downs](#)," *Find A Grave*. Online. Accessed July 11, 2025.

water dashed it with great force on him. It required great nerve to receive this douch without a scream to the full volume of the voice, and a long leap from the rock to escape another bucket of water until the system had recovered from the shock.”⁶³⁷ Near the church and DeGraffenreid home, there was another favorite student bathing spot, where Goodloe’s Spring ran along for about a hundred yards, before plunging over a little fifteen foot bluff. The students called the falls, “the spout,” concentrating the stream with a chestnut sapling, stripping themselves and bathing under the cascade. Inevitably, while students were enjoying their showers, others would steal to atop the bluff and drop handfuls of pebbles into the chestnut trough, scurrying away as the bathers were deluged with stones.⁶³⁸

Other features on the mountain familiar to and frequented by the students were Gambler’s Retreat and Sand Rock. The former was a setting underneath a cliffside overhang reached by a narrow path, featuring comfortable seating on stone ledges, a popular place for a secluded retreat. Noted physician [John Allan Wyeth](#) recollected that “it was considered a test of courage” to crawl along the ledge, and “no student was considered a full-fledged cadet until he had made this perilous passage.”⁶³⁹ Sand Rock was a vast dome of pure sandstone from which the residents could secure scouring tools for domestic use. The students would clamber to its top and their carve their names into the soft stone.⁶⁴⁰ Thomas Hobbs noted in his diaries that these and other promotories were destinations of choice for Sunday strolls on pleasant afternoons.⁶⁴¹

Board of Trustees.

The act establishing the college also named a large Board of Trustees of 50 members, albeit Anson West noted there were vociferous objections to a governance board so large.⁶⁴² However, if the Act of 1856, incorporating

⁶³⁷ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 8-9.

⁶³⁸ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857.*](#) New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 99.

⁶³⁹ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857.*](#) New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 99.

⁶⁴⁰ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 10.

⁶⁴¹ Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), pp. 63 -76.

⁶⁴² Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama.*](#) Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 438.

Florence Wesleyan University is any guide, seven trustees were deemed a quorum, sufficient to conduct business.⁶⁴³

Rev. Turner Hubbard Saunders (1782 – 1854), was the son of Revolutionary War veteran Thomas Saunders and his wife Ann. He and his



57 Turner Hubbard Saunders (1782-'854)

first wife Anne Dunn moved from Franklin, Tennessee to Courtland in 1822 where he became a wealthy cotton planter.⁶⁴⁴ A Methodist preacher as well, he was appointed as one of the local members of the board, served at its first president, a position he held for 25 years. His son,

James Edmonds Saunders (1806 – 1896), University of South Carolina and Princeton attendee and successful

attorney in the area, would also serve on the La Grange Board at a later date, as well as the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama. James was active in the Alabama General Assembly, built a splendid home on the family property near Courtland called Rocky Hill, and fought for the confederacy, earning the rank of colonel during the war⁶⁴⁵

Turner Saunders, Alexander Sale, Alexander Sledge, John Davis, Moses Hall, John Southerland Jr, Benjamin B. Jones, Claiborne Saunders, Epps Moody, Henry S. Foote, Sion L. Perry, James B. Lockhart, William H. Winter, Dudley Dunn, Thomas Wooldridge, Hartwell King, Bernard McKernan, John W. Hodges, John W. Scott, Freeman Fitzgerald, and Richard Ellis were the local Trustee members. William Winans, Edmund McGehee, Alexander Covington, Greenwood LaFlow (Greenwood LaFlore), John Ross, William McMahon, Alexander Talley, Joseph McDowell, James McFerrin, John M. Taylor, Henry W. Rhodes, Jack Shackelford, Samuel W. Mardis, Robert Paine, Weston T. Rucker, Henry R. W. Hill, Thomas Brandon, John D. Bibb, Gilbert D. Taylor, Jesse Coe, Richard Jones, James Saunders, John M. Holland, James H. Mellard, Robert L. Kennon, David Moore, Robert H. Watkins, John B. Rowe, and John Coffee were the distance members.

⁶⁴³ [*An Act to Incorporate Florence Wesleyan University*](#), House 265. *Acts of the Fifth Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama*. Montgomery: Bates and Lucas, 1856. February 14, 1856, p. 206. (Initially vetoed by Governor Winston but passed subsequently by a constitutional legislative majority.

⁶⁴⁴ [Saunders-Paine House](#).” *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. United States Department of Interior. Digitally available from Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Online. Accessed November 5, 2025. Mississippi registration [received by National Park Service](#) August 14, 2017

⁶⁴⁵ James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 327. James was the son of Turner Saunders, and his book is perhaps the earliest. History of Lawrence County, Alabama.

Alexander Sledge (1789 – 1861), Philadelphia-trained physician, planter, and resident of La Grange was another local board member and like Saunders was likely there those first tumultuous days as La Grange College got underway. He and his wife Winnifred had eight children. His son Alexander, Jr. attended the school in 1852. His daughter, Mary, would marry a future president of La Grange, Edward Wadsworth. Dr. Sledge was supportive of La Grange financially, and established a scholarship that he maintained for the duration of his lifetime. One son, Nathan fought in the 4th Alabama Regiment, and Dr. Sledge enlisted as a private in the 15th Alabama.⁶⁴⁶ He died in Greensboro, Alabama in 1861.

Alexander Sale. Another local trustee and native Virginian, Rev. Alexander Sale (1780 – 1863), moved to Tennessee Valley around 1820. A slave-holding Methodist minister, his son John Burrus Sale would graduate from La Grange College with honors in 1837.⁶⁴⁷

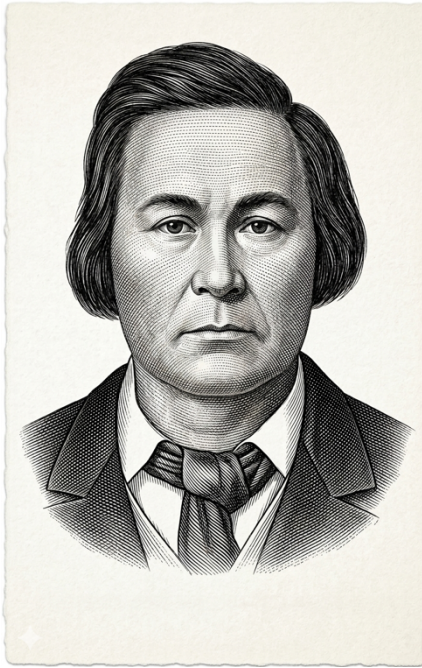
Hartwell King. Much of the land in the area belonged to the King family, the patriarch of whom was [Hartwell Richard King](#) (1785 – 1841). A wealthy planter whose main plantation home was in the valley near Leighton, King and relations summered on the mountain. He was a charter member of the La Grange board and served until his death. Moving with a large North Carolina entourage to the Valley in 1826, he was a member of the state legislature representing Lawrence county. He and his wife [Burchet Curtis King](#) (1785 – 1872) had eleven children. Together, Hartwell, Burchet and their children's families owned several thousand acres around Leighton. The sons included [Oswald King](#) (1806 – 1882), Robert King (1809 – 1866), Philemon King (1820 – 1878), Hartwell King (1820 – 1872) and Paul King (1822 – 1878). The daughters included Mary (1811 – 1860) Martha Berchet (1808 -1904), Susan (1813 – 1860) and Ann (1830 -1902), all of whom

His middle name is sometimes spelled as Edmond, and his surname is sometimes spelled as Sanders. "[Col. James Edmonds Saunders](#)," [Find a Grave](#). Accessed June 25, 2005.

⁶⁴⁶ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography. Vol. 4](#). Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921, p. 1571; "Dr. Alexander Sledge." [Obituary](#). *Demopolis Times*, August 13, 1936. Accessed June 22, 2025. Winnifred's grandfather Nathan Bryan was a revolutionary war figure and member of Congress when it met in Philadelphia).

⁶⁴⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, pp. 437-444; "[Alexander Sale](#)," [Wiki Tree](#), accessed May 27, 2025; Garrett, William G. [Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama for Thirty Years. With An Appendix](#). Atlanta: Plantation Printing Company Press, 1872, p. 282..

raised families.⁶⁴⁸ During the years that La Grange College was an active, going concern, the population of the Tennessee Valley remained rather sparse, the numbers of wealthy planters, professionals and mercantilists rather few. Intermarriage among those regional families were a frequent and common occurrence. Among the children of Hartwell and Burchet, for example, spouses were selected from the Delony, the Fennel, the Peck, and Curtis families. One of the daughters married Edwin Goodwin, professor of ancient languages at La Grange, and author of the novel, *Lily White*.⁶⁴⁹



58 Greenwood LeFlore 1800-1865

Greenwood LaFlore, John Ross.

Two of the most interesting appointees to the Board were the historically significant figures, Greenwood LeFlore and John Ross. The former was a mestizo leader of the Choctaw, his mother a member of a powerful clan and his father a French employee of Panton and Leslie. John Ross' standing among the Cherokee could be traced to one grandparent of the Bird clan. Raised among the Cherokee, his other ancestors were Scots.⁶⁵⁰ Even as Andrew Jackson ascended to the presidency in 1828 with his eye on all the native lands in the Southeast, the Methodist church clung as if by inertia to its commitment to educating the native populations, a value that Robert Paine, as a young itinerant minister embraced

and practiced in his formative years.⁶⁵¹ In codicils to the Dancing Rabbit Creek signed July 1830, which doomed the Choctaw to removal to Oklahoma, tribal leader David Folsom was allotted one hundred dollars to enable his sons to attend La Grange College, and LeFlore was to be awarded the same for his daughter's enrollment at the Lafayette Female Academy

⁶⁴⁸ "Hartwell Richard King," [Find A Grave](#), Accessed June 23, 2025.

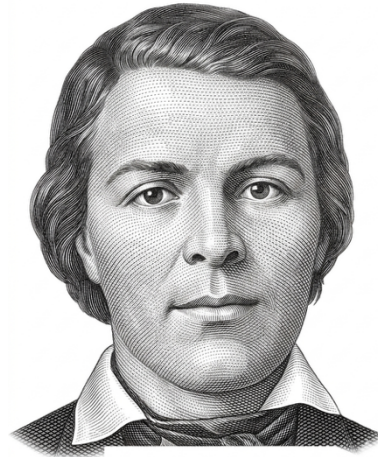
⁶⁴⁹ "Hartwell Richard King," [Find A Grave](#), Accessed June 23, 2025.

⁶⁵⁰ "[Greenwood LeFlore](#)," *Wikipedia*. Accessed June 10, 2025; "[John Ross \(Cherokee Chief\)](#)," *Wikipedia*. Accessed June 10, 2025. Graphic of Ross appears earlier.

⁶⁵¹ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. [Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama](#). Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974. Accessible: Internet Archive, pp. 47-50.

there.⁶⁵² But the Indian Removal Act, May 1830, effectively closed the door to any significant indigenous enrollment at La Grange or elsewhere in the Southeast.⁶⁵³

Richard Ellis. At least two of the board members loomed large in Texas history. [Richard Ellis \(1781 - 1846\)](#) was appointed to the Board from Franklin County, where he had served as its representative to the Alabama constitutional convention in 1819. A tidewater Virginia native, he read for law in Richmond, and was admitted to the bar around 1806. By 1817, he had joined the migration to Huntsville and subsequently moved to Tuscumbia, raising cotton on his plantation while continuing his law practice. He became a judge of the Fourth Circuit Court and associate member of the Alabama Supreme Court. His travels to Texas began as early as 1826, and in 1834 moved his family and 34 slaves to a 4,428 acre land grant in Miller County, Arkansas, a disputed area along the Red River that became part of Bowie County, Texas later.⁶⁵⁴



59 Richard Ellis La Grange Board of Trustees and leader of Texas independence

At that time, Texas beckoned to American settlers with the promise of rich land and political autonomy. Mexico granted large tracts of land to men

⁶⁵² Shackleford, Nora Jeanne. *The LeFlore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal*. Master's Thesis. Ada: East Central State College, 1963, pp. 49 -51. (The treaty erroneously places the two schools the children were to attend to be in Georgia rather than in Alabama; probably clerical confusion on the name. There was also a LaGrange, Georgia at the time. It is not clear that either chief's children attended the schools, but by this time, the Methodists had appointed LeFlore to the LaGrange College Board of Trustees, an interesting commentary on prospective acculturation even as the removal of the Choctaw loomed); DeRosier, Arthur H. Jr. *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians from Mississippi*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959. Ph. D. Dissertation, p. 144; Owen, Marie Bankhead. [The Story of Alabama: A History of the State](#). New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1949. Vol. I, p. 104.

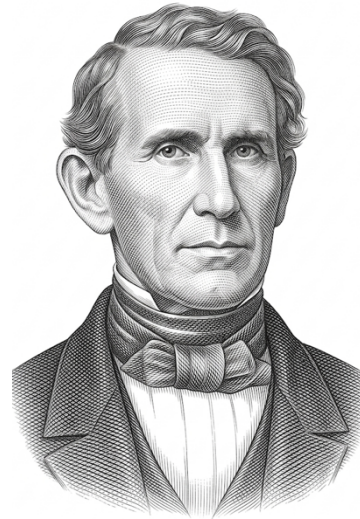
⁶⁵³ Ethan Davis. "[An Administrative Trail of Tears: Indian Removal](#)," *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2008-2010), p.52; Ray, Johnathan. [Andrew Jackson and the Indians, 1767–1815](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2014. Ph. D. Dissertation; pp. 249-250.

⁶⁵⁴ "[Richard Ellis: A Key Figure in Texas History](#)". Texas State Historical Association. Published 1952, Updated August 3, 2020. Accessed June 25, 2025; "[Richard Ellis \(Texas Politician\)](#)". Wikipedia. Accessed June 25, 2025.

like Stephen F. Austin, who in turn recruited settlers from Alabama, Tennessee and elsewhere. These colonists brought with them not only their agricultural ambitions and their slaves, but their Protestant faith and social customs. Although Mexico initially welcomed this migration to stabilize and defend its sparsely populated northern frontier, tensions grew as the influx of Anglo-Americans threatened to overwhelm Mexican authority. In the 1830s, the Mexican government, under increasing centralization, moved to restrict further American immigration and to enforce its 1829 abolition of slavery – a direct threat to the economic foundation of many Anglo-Texan settlements.

The *Law of April 6* in 1830, formally curtailing U. S. immigration and increasing Mexican military presence in the region caused greater friction. Texians, as the Anglo settlers like Richard Ellis were called, increasingly viewed these measures as violations of their rights, and agitation grew for greater autonomy. Political tension grew with the rise of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who dismantled Mexico's federalist constitution and ruled as a centrist strongman.

These developments laid the ideological and constitutional groundwork for the Texas Declaration of Independence and the formation of a provisional government and constitutions in 1836. It was in that year that Ellis was selected as one of the several delegates from his region to the Constitutional Convention which convened March 1, 1836 at Washington-on-the-Brazos. There, he was *unanimously elected president and on March 2 signed the Texas Declaration of Independence*. For more than two weeks, he held the fractious covention together until the Republic of Texas consitution was drafted. He subsequently served in the Texas Senate through 1840. He died in 1846; Ellis County, formed in 1849 was named in his honor.⁶⁵⁵



60 Jack Shackelford 1790-1857

⁶⁵⁵Richardson, Rupert B, "[Framing the Constitution of Texas.](#)" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (January 1928), pp. 191-220. "[Richard Ellis \(1781-1846\)](#)" . Wiki Tree. Accessed June 25, 2025. "[Richard Ellis: A Key Figure in Texas History](#)". Texas State Historical Association. Published 1952, Updated August 3, 2020. Accessed June 25, 2025.

Jack Shackelford. Perhaps more compelling is the story of Jack Shackelford (1790 – 1857), trustee from Courtland. Born in Richmond, Virginia, he moved to Winnsboro, South Carolina as a young adult, married Maria Younge, daughter of a Presbyterian minister. He fought in the War of 1812, and received a sword slash across his face for his gallantry. Little is known of his formal education, but by 1818 he was in Shelby County Alabama, operating a plantation and practicing medicine, in which he developed a favorable reputation. In 1820, he was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives and subsequently served in the Senate, 1822 – 24.⁶⁵⁶ In 1822, he was appointed to the first Board of Trustees of the formative University of Alabama. Governor Israel Pickens presided as the *ex officio* president.⁶⁵⁷

Suffering fiscal reversals, Shackelford was able to obtain in 1829 appointment as receiver in the land office in Courtland where he resided over the sale of public lands for proceeds to build the ill-fated Muscle Shoals canal. He soon became a powerful member of the Valley community. By 1830, he was listed as President of the Courtland Chapter of the American Colonization Society. In 1832, he was appointed Secretary of the nascent Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad.⁶⁵⁸

Most remarkable however was his role in the Texas Revolution and the massacre of volunteer militia at Goliad. Shortly before the declaration of independence, as hostilities increased, Texian forces captured San Antonio de Bexar and forced General Martin Pefecto de Cos to surrender. Santa Anna immediately marched northward to crush the rebellion. His forces besieged and overwhelmed the Alamo garrison on March 6, 1836 executing nearly all defenders, including William Travis, James Bowie and Davy Crockett. Another arm of his campaign moved toward Presidio la Bahia, near Goliad, where Colonel James Walker Fannin commanded several hundred Texian

⁶⁵⁶ James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [*Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies*](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, pp. 207-208.

⁶⁵⁷ Willis G. Clark. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 34.

⁶⁵⁸ [*The African Repository and Colonial Journal*](#), Vol. V, No. 12 (February 1830) p. 351, lists the members of the Auxiliary Societies, including La Grange (accessible online: Hathi Trust has all 68 volumes, 1825-1892)); [*American Railroad Journal and Advocate of Internal Improvements*](#), Vo. 52 (December 31, 1836, pp. 321-323 (accessible online via Hathi Trust)).

volunteers. It was there that Jack Shackelford and his Alabama militia met their fate.⁶⁵⁹

Responding to the call for aid posted in the Huntsville *Democrat* the previous November, Shackelford raised a militia company in the Tennessee Valley from the area surrounding Courtland. Fully a third of the population of that hamlet volunteered. Decked in homemade uniforms of red-dyed linsey-woolsey, coonskin caps, with large knives strapped to their thighs, and carrying muskets purchased from the Alabama armory, the detachment of some sixty volunteers began to make its way to Texas. The first leg of the journey in December 12, 1835, was upon the mule-drawn coaches of Shackelford's Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur railroad – according to one source, likely the first military unit in the United States to be carried to war by train.⁶⁶⁰ Three steamboats took them to Texas: the *William Penn* from Tuscumbia, the *Kentuckian* from Tuscumbia, and from there upon the *Brutus* to their transshipment point on LaVaca Bay, Texas. On February 12, the unit arrived at Goliad, accompanied by Dr. Joseph H. Barnard, another physician.⁶⁶¹

In December 1835, James Walker Fannin had been appointed by Sam Houston as commanding officer of the volunteers holding the fortress at Goliad. The force was a pastiche of units from around the South. In addition to the Red Rovers from Courtland were units from Alabama (the Huntsville Volunteers, the Alabama Greys from Montgomery and the Mobile

⁶⁵⁹ Elliott, Claude. "[Alabama and the Texas Revolution](#)." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (January 1947), pp. 315 – 328; Sullivan, Steven Linwood. [Armed Adventurers: A Perspective on the Remembered Past of the Battle of Coleto Creek and the Goliad Massacre](#). M. A. Thesis. History. Liberty University, 2023; Talley, Maj. Michael J. [Leadership Principles Attached to the Goliad Campaign of 1836](#). Master of Military Arts and Science. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2005; Yoakum, Henderson. [History of Texas from its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846](#). In two volumes. Vol. II. New York: Redfield, 1855, Appendix: "From the Notes of Captain John Shackelford," pp. 522 – 525. Note: Shackelford's name is misspelled.

⁶⁶⁰ Talley, Maj. Michael J. [Leadership Principles Attached to the Goliad Campaign of 1836](#). Master of Military Arts and Science. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2002, p. 21. Accessed July 1, 2025. "[The Alabama Red Rovers: Heroes of the Texas Revolution](#)." *The Texas State Historical Association Online*. Accessed July 1, 2025; "[The Goliad Massacre: A Turning Point in the Texas Revolution](#)." *The Texas State Historical Association*,. Accessed July 1, 2025.

⁶⁶¹ [The Alabama Red Rovers: Heroes of the Texas Revolution](#)." *The Texas State Historical Association Online*. Accessed July 1, 2025; Christopher Smith. [Armed Adventurers: A Perspective on the Remembered Past of the Battle of Coleto Creek and the Goliad Massacre](#). M. A. Thesis, Liberty University, 2023.

Greys), Kentucky, New Orleans. At one time or another, Fannin could count of on as many as 175 Alabamians in his force.⁶⁶² Fannin met his demise shortly after the fall of the Alamo, at the Battle of Coleto Creek on March 20, 1836, where he and a major portion of his soldiers had been surrounded by a larger Mexican force. The thrice-wounded Fannin negotiated the surrender of his surviving band after a two-day fight. After the battle the men were marched back to Goliad, where they were sequestered for a few days as other of Fannin's troops were rounded up and brought in. Shackelford, a physician, Dr. Joseph H. Barnard, a Massachusetts military surgeon who had enlisted in the Red Rovers in Texas, and a Dr. Field attended to the dying and wounded of both sides.⁶⁶³

On orders from Santa Anna, on Palm Sunday, March 27, the commandant of the post had the soldiers under armed guard in three groups marched about half a mile from the post down separate roads. Away from the fort, they were halted and gunned down by their captors, the wounded bayoneted, their bodies stripped and set ablaze. From Colonel Guerrier's tent a short distance away, the surviving physicians Shackelford, Barnard, Hall and Field could hear the gunshots and screams as their comrades were killed. An hour later, as many as 80 wounded were dragged from the compound and also slaughtered. Altogether some 342 prisoners were killed that day. Among the dead was Shackelford's son, Fortunatus, and the son of another La Grange trustee, Robert Fenner. Only 28 were reckoned to have escaped the firing squads — a handful of Rovers were among them. From the ambushade, Wilson Simpson, Dillard Cooper, Zachariah Brooks and a severely wounded Issac Hamilton made their getaway. Lt. W. H. Francis and Joseph Fenner, brother of Robert, were on reconnaissance at the time and also escaped with their lives. Some sources add George Washington Brooks, brother of Zachariah, to their party.⁶⁶⁴ Dr. Shackelford remained at

⁶⁶² Talley, Maj. Michael J. [*Leadership Principles Attached to the Goliad Campaign of 1836*](#). Master of Military Arts and Science. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2002, p. 22.

⁶⁶³ “[Dr. J. H. Barnard's Journal: December 1835 – March 27th 1835](#).” Compiled by J. A. White. N.D. The Portal to Texas History. Online. Accessed July 2, 2025; Elliott, Claude. “Alabama and the Texas Revolution.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (January 1947), pp. 315 – 328; “[Joseph Henry Barnard: Military Surgeon and Diarist](#).” *Texas State Historical Association*. Online. Accessed July 2, 2025.

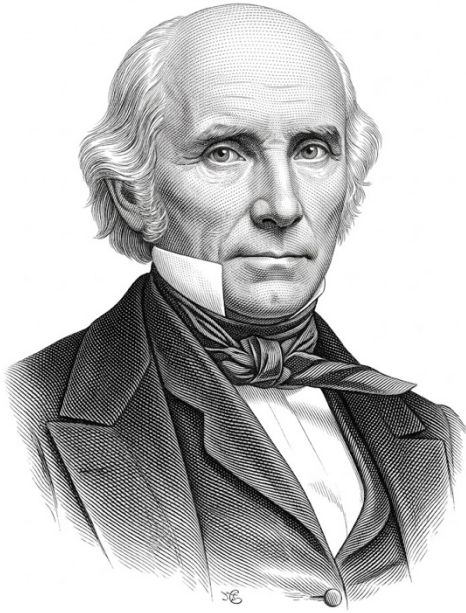
⁶⁶⁴ James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [*Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies*](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, pp. 208-211; “[The Goliad Massacre: A Turning Point in the Texas Revolution](#).” *The Texas State Historical Association*.

the post along with the other physicians until about April 20, when he accompanied Dr. Barnard to San Antonio to attend ailing Mexican soldiers. They remained their captives until the tumult of the Texan victory at San Jacinto enabled their escape. Receiving his discharge, and leaving Dr. Barnard in service, he made his way home to the grieving community of Courtland that had already presumed him dead. Henry Stuart Foote, himself a contemporary of Jack Shackelford, and fellow La Grange trustee, recalls standing on the promontory there at La Grange, taking in the Tennessee Valley below, when from the distant towns of Tusculumbia and Courtland, came the thundering sound of cannon. Jack Shackelford was on the train, coming home, and the people of the valley were welcoming him with military honors.⁶⁶⁵ In his journal, Thomas Hobbs adds a poignant portrait of a later day, in April 1845, when Shackelford and Major Robert Fenner, Board of Trustees members dined together with the students at La Grange. The solemnity of the moment must have been palpable.

Accessed July 1, 2025; Shackelford, Jack. [“The Red Rovers.”](#) Transcription of Dr. Jack Shackelford’s Account of the Goliad Massacre to the Editors of the North Alabamian, In Jack Shackelford Collection of papers and letters, Digital Archives, Alabama Department of Archives & History. Online.

⁶⁶⁵ Henry Stuart Foote. [Texas and the Texans, or Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the South-west.](#) In Two Volumes. Vol. II. Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Company, 1841, pp. 247-248, p. 227. Foote’s Texas history is one of the very best treatments of the events at Goliad; Yoakum, Henderson. [History of Texas from its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846.](#) In two volumes. Vol. II. New York: Redfield, 1855, Appendix: “From the Notes of Captain John Shackleford,” pp. 522 – 525. Note: Shackelford’s name is misspelled. Note: Survivors: Wilson Simpson, Dillard Cooper, Zachariah Brooks, Issac D. Hamilton([Highland Lakes History Guide](#)) ([Cooper Reminiscences](#))([Wikipedia](#))([Dillard Cooper, THSA](#))([Issac D. Cooper Wikipedia](#)) ([geni](#)))from the massacre site. W. H. Francis, Joseph Fenner, with Horton’s advance guard ([Alabama Genealogy](#)). Also a George Washington Brooks ([rootsweb](#)) Zachariah Brooks is identified as [George Washington Brooks](#) (1808-1887) brother, who was also on the Horton expedition.

Henry S. Foote. Living in Mississippi at the time La Grange was chartered in 1830, [Henry Stuart Foote](#) (1804 – 1880) cut quite a historical figure himself. Foote was born in Virginia, graduated from Washington College (now Washington & Lee) in 1819 and was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1823. By 1825, he was living in Tuscumbia, initiating his law practice there while editing a Democratic newspaper. While living in Mississippi he traveled to Texas and subsequently authored his *Texas and the Texans* (1841) in which he vividly paints the picture of the fate of the Red Rovers and Shackelford.



61 Henry S. Foote 1804-1880

In 1847, he was elected U. S. Senator from Mississippi and during his tenure chaired the Foreign Relations Committee. Foote was known for fiery speeches defending slavery while also championing membership in the U.S. and supporting the Missouri Compromise.

He nearly duelled multiple times, including famously confronting Thomas Hart Benton by drawing a pistol during Senate debates. He engaged in a decades long rivalry with fellow Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis which included fistfights and threats of duels. In 1852, narrowly defeating Davis, he was elected Mississippi governor on a Unionist platform. His term saw tensions over secession rise and he resigned shortly before his term ended, moving to California in 1854.⁶⁶⁶ Other members of the board of trustees will be examined as the saga of La Grange College unfolds.

La Grange: The First Faculty.

La Grange College opened its doors to its first modest cadre of students on January 11, 1830. For future cycles, the January session would mark the second term of the year, with the first term beginning in July.

⁶⁶⁶ Wynne, Ben. [The Man Who Punched Jefferson Davis. The Political Life of Henry S. Foote, Southern Unionist](#). Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2018.

Hudson, Sims and Paine prepared their courses of instruction of the 70 or so eager learners in their midst by March 1830. From the beginning, the challenge of finding and recruiting students to the remote mountain fastness was present, as [Spring Hill College](#) and the [University of Alabama](#) began operations at almost the same time. Although not chartered until 1836, the first bishop of Mobile, [Micheal Portier](#), began instruction to the first thirty students at the Catholic College, May 1, 1830, and in July the cornerstone of the first building was laid.⁶⁶⁷ Alva Woods, President of Transylvania College took the helm of the University of Alabama, April 12, 1831.⁶⁶⁸ Higher education in a rugged frontier state was taking root.

As documented, the criteria for admission were rigorous at all the young colleges, mirroring the requirements of established, prestigious colleges such as Yale.⁶⁶⁹ La Grange's was a daunting curriculum, emphasizing. Ancient languages, and mental and moral philosophy, the latter while eschewing sectarian doctrine, required the students to consider evidence of the "truth" of religion. The school year began in the summer months, the "sickly season" in the river valleys and canebreaks. Lawrence Mountain was considered to be above the miasma, a safe place. The intersession between the two terms was kept short, allowing students the option of remaining in the healthier environment of the mountaintop. In fact, in the first 15 years La Grange was in operation, only one student died from fever. And that student had begun exhibiting malarial symptoms on his day of arrival at the college.⁶⁷⁰ Willis Clark summarized neatly the process and consequence of selections of sites such as La Grange:

It was common for planters, cultivating large tracts of canebrake and bottom lands, which were not considered healthful for residence for white people, to gather, from miles around, on some elevated, well- watered, sandy location, build

⁶⁶⁷ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 185, p. 212.

⁶⁶⁸ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 36.

⁶⁶⁹ Baldwin, Ebenezer. [History of Yale College from Its Foundation to the Year](#) 1838. New Haven: Hezekiah Howe, 1841, p. 29.

⁶⁷⁰ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), pp. 9-10; Barnard, Harry V.. "[LaGrange College: A Historical Sketch](#)," *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, p. 10.

*comfortable dwellings, organize churches, schools, and academies, and surround themselves with the comforts and pleasures of refined and cultivated society. These educational centres, so to speak, were renowned for intelligence, good order, and a generous hospitality. The leisure and comparative wealth of the inhabitants gave opportunity for social and intellectual pleasures, and the teacher and the schools were always chief objects of local pride and consideration. The fame of some of these schools spread far beyond the immediate vicinage, and attracted thither numbers of families from less favored localities to share in the high social and educational privileges these centres afforded. Thus the school was, at the same time, the giver and partaker of benefit; for every additional family in the village became a warm supporter of the school and, in general, a desirable addition to the local society.*⁶⁷¹

Robert Paine. President Robert Paine would steer the precarious fortunes of the college for 16 years, keeping it fiscally afloat while graduating the leaders a frontier land. During that first term he would appoint a cadre of faculty charged with preparing a growing of frontier students, the sons of planters, professionals and mercantilists, for leadership roles in the young nation. Two of the faculty have been introduced, William W. Hudson and Edward Dromgoole Sims, both had the classical college training that Paine lacked. And it appears that within a short time, they were able to add Collin D. Elliott as director of their Preparatory Unit. It was his job to prepare the bulk of the aspirants who were otherwise unprepared for the rigors of the curriculum that awaited them. Soon a fifth faculty member, university trained, but not in the rigors of the academy was added as chair of chemistry. William Harrington would serve the university for four years.⁶⁷²

Those five men had the responsibility for managing a campus, a curriculum, and the instruction of seventy students from the outset. Just how Paine and his small staff managed that is no longer known as the narrative has vanished. But extrapolation is possible by comparing the 1843 report of President Alva Woods to the board of trustees at the University of Alabama. Woods could call on five faculty and two tutors to assist him. Paine would have his three: Hudson, Sims, Harrington and Elliott, in his

⁶⁷¹ Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 203.

⁶⁷² Clark, Willis G. *History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*. Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 185, p. 191.

probable role as tutor, moving over from the La Grange male preparatory school.⁶⁷³

Paine's qualifications as president, or superintendent as he insisted on being called initially, rested on his reputation as a preacher, organizer and Methodist leader. His leadership style prioritized Methodist values: piety, discipline, and moral education. "Old Bob" as the thirty one year old was known to his students, seems to have been well regarded by the board, by his faculty and the student body as he steadfastly guided the school's fortunes through troubled fiscal waters and a roilsome political climate. The department that the school assigned to the president was geology and moral science. He mastered geology and mineralogy through personal reading and observation. And the mountain proved a good laboratory for the subject, for the sandstone bluffs readily yielded their fossils and their stratigraphy revealed the passing of the geologic ages. And he seemed to take to the discipline, recounting once that he passed a complete twenty four hours in one mountain cavern excavating and bringing to the college labs a wide array of striking specimens.⁶⁷⁴ "He became," reported a biographer "a practical geologist, ahead of most men of his day." His student Thomas Hubbard Hobbs recalls him asserting that lead ore had been found on the mountain of sufficient purity that a foundry could be built if ore were extracted in adequate quantity.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷³ At La Grange, as at the University, the faculty divided the onerous chore of hearing, correcting, and grading the students in their many courses, which became more numerous as the college grew. For Paine, it would be mental and moral philosophy, political economy, mineralogy, mineralogy; Hudson had the responsibility to hear mathematics and modern languages; Sims heard all the ancient languages recitations, and at times before his departure had responsibilities for mathematics and natural philosophy. Harrington would hear the chemistry recitations. Just where the responsibilities for English literature fell is not clear, but perhaps with Collin D. Elliott, who had strong skills in that area, which he may have exercised in addition to filling the essential role in the Preparatory Department.

⁶⁷⁴ Clark, Willis G. *History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*. Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 185, p. 191. Other key insights into Robert Paine include his own *Notes of Life* (Thomas Fite Paine, Jr. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. "*Notes of Life*" and "*Pictures from My Diary*," Nashville, TN: typewritten compilation of Paine's contributions in 39 installments in *The Nashville Christian Advocate*); , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916. Internet Archive.; Thrift, C. T. [*Robert Paine, Methodist Bishop: A Great North Carolina Person's Greatest Son*](#). Durham: C. T. Thrift. n. d. Several online versions.

⁶⁷⁵ , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916. Internet Archive.,

His biographers recount that he was on firmer ground in his moral philosophy classroom, where his lectures could draw upon his sectarian groundings. Biographer Rivers presents in hagiographic detail Paine's castigation of David Hume. And while the particulars are absent, the president likely attacked Hume's position in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) where the philosopher famously argued that cause and effect must be established by repeated observation of one event following another, suggesting that "a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature" and that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle." Methodist theologians often tied natural theology to moral certainty. Causation wasn't just *observed*; it was *willed* by the Christian god. Likely in his lesson to his students, Paine likely emphasized that Hume undermined both Revelation and Providence. "The great philosopher," wrote Rivers, "like a grounded ship, was left to sink in the muddy waters of foulest error." A revival spread through the ranks of the college in the aftermath of the lecture to the senior class, with almost the entire student body professing conversion.⁶⁷⁶

William W. Hudson (1808 – 1859) was a well-placed hire for La Grange, and was present to assist Robert Paine bring order to the chaotic campus on opening day. Unlike his self-educated President, Hudson



possessed the B. A. and M. A. that he had earned at Yale University in 1827 and 1830 respectively. When James Birney was making the rounds in the East to recruit the first faculty at the University of Alabama, Hudson was on his list of prospects. It is not clear how he got to La Grange; there are intimations that he may have been teaching beforehand at Green Academy in Huntsville,

⁶² William W. Hudson (1808-1859)
La Grange Faculty and
future President of the University of Missouri

p.50; *Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*. Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 22.

⁶⁷⁶ , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916. Internet Archive, pp. 59-60.

where James Birney was a trustee.⁶⁷⁷ At La Grange he took the chair of mathematics and simultaneously taught modern languages.⁶⁷⁸ But like others of his college, the remote little college on the mountain could not keep his long. He quickly left La Grange for the University of Alabama in 1833, where he remained as professor of mathematics until his resignation in 1837.⁶⁷⁹ There, the first professor of mathematics, Gurdon Saltonstall had been ingloriously removed by the trustees in December 1832, and President Alva Woods had been rather assiduously recruiting Hudson during the months-long process of removal. Saltonstall would die in Tuscaloosa in 1834.⁶⁸⁰

Hudson was destined for greater things. Initially signed to a one-year contract, he would remain at Alabama for four years. As he and Sims had done at La Grange, he would work with Professor Bonfils to develop regulations for a proposed preparatory department in order to enhance the level of scholarship among enrolling students.⁶⁸¹ In 1838, he would leave for the University of Missouri, where he would become President in 1856, serving in that capacity until his death.⁶⁸²

Edward Dromgoole Sims (1805 -1845), who briefly filled the chair of Ancient Languages, was a superb linguist with a short but distinguished career. A graduate of the University of North Carolina, with an A. B. in 1824 and a A. M. in 1827, he had made his way to the mountain of La Grange to fill the principalship at the boys' school there. His Methodist celebrity had

⁶⁷⁷ Windham, Kevin. [*Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1837*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010, p. 94.

⁶⁷⁸ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p.437; Barnard, Harry V. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, Vol. 2 (1957), p. 10; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 13.

⁶⁷⁹ Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, p. 190.

⁶⁸⁰ Windham, Kevin. [*Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1837*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010, p. 94.; James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 59.

⁶⁸¹ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 59.

⁶⁸² "[William Wilson](#) Hudson ." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed July 17, 2025.

preceded him to the region. His grandfather was the noted minister Edward Dromgoole, who played a leading role in the separation of the Methodist Episcopal Church from the Church of England in 1784, and in establishing the Ebenezer Academy in Brunswick County, Virginia, one of the first Methodist schools in the United States. When the college opened, Paine offered Sims, whose first year contract at the boys' school on the mountain was ending, the chair of Ancient Languages at the College.⁶⁸³ Sims carried his classes through the 1830 sessions before achieving his Methodist ministerial credentials in October of that year and entering the itineracy. He momentarily kept his ties to the College, accepting appointment as professor of mathematics and natural philosophy in 1832. At the end of the term, Sims transferred to the Virginia Methodist Conference, and became a professor at Randolph Macon college, which was opening its doors at that time.⁶⁸⁴

Edward Dromgoole Sims was a pioneer of Anglo-Saxon instruction in the United States, and compiled materials for an Anglo-Saxon grammar and brought early philological and linguistic curriculum development to the colleges where he taught. Granted leave from Randolph Macon starting in 1836, he travelled and studied in Europe at Halle and elsewhere. When he returned, his class in Anglo-Saxon was probably the first in an American college. By circumstance, in 1841, he departed Randolph Macon, accepting the professorship of English at the University of Alabama. In the Spring of that year, Sims was preparing to marry [Ann Andrews McKinney](#) (1815 - 1882), a widower and sister of his own wife, [Grace Andrews Sims](#) (1821-1839) who died in the first year of their marriage. Both were daughters of Professor [Ethan Allen Andrews](#) (1787 – 1858), author of a noted Latin grammar. As the laws of Virginia at the time prohibited such a marriage, his option was to leave the state, taking the chair of Languages at the University of Alabama. He introduced in Tuscaloosa a course in Anglo-Saxon similar to his program at Randolph Macon. He died there in 1845. Lost in

⁶⁸³ Thomas Fite Paine, Jr. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *“Notes of Life” and “Pictures from My Diary,”* p. 63; [“Edward Dromgoole,”](#) *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Online. Accessed July 16, 2025; Kern, A. A. [“A Pioneer in Anglo-Saxon.”](#) *The Sewanee Review*, July 1903 (Vol 11, No. 3), p. 338.

⁶⁸⁴ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893. Kindle download. Hathi Trust, pp. 456-457; Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, p. 34.

the aftermath of his death, his manuscripts of his exploratory works on Anglo-Saxon grammar and dictionary were discovered forty years later in a St. Louis bookstore by a reader who recognized his name. The materials were purchased and sent to Richard Irby at Randolph Macon, where they remain in the college archives.⁶⁸⁵

William H. Harrington (1810 -). Less is known about William Harrington, who during that first term filled the chair of chemistry at La Grange. Harrington was educated as a physician, and had a scientific bent, eventually building a name for himself in the nascent field of photography. He filled the chemistry post for four years, resigning in 1834. In that year, he moved to Florence and opened a medical practice there for a while—until he killed a man in a duel.⁶⁸⁶ At La Grange, the chemistry role seems to have remained unfilled for a while while Paine searched for a replacement.

Leaving Florence under a cloud, Harrington spent some time in Tuscaloosa, when he began an association with Frederick A. P. Barnard, professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. The two of them set up a gallery for making daguerrotypes, and, in addition to a thriving business, made significant contributions to shortening the exposure time of the process to seconds.⁶⁸⁷ Their daguerrotypes of Governor Josuha Lanier Martin and his wife Sarah Ann Martin have been preserved and are said to

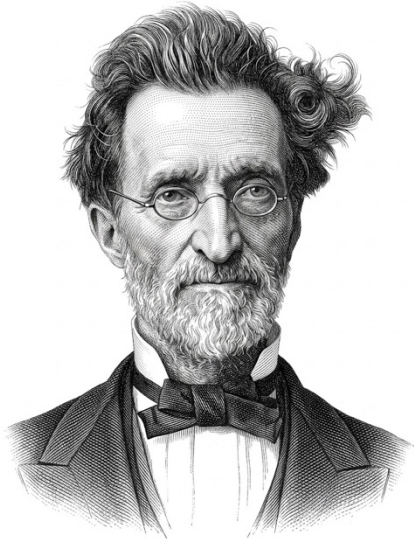
⁶⁸⁵ Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, pp. 88-89; Kern, A. A. “[A Pioneer in Anglo-Saxon](#).” *Sewanee Review*, July 1903 (Vol 11, No. 3), pp. 338; Andrews’ Latin Grammar is available on Internet Archive; “[Edward Dromgoole Sims](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 17, 2025. For additional information on Sims and early linguistic studies, see Callaway, Morgan, Jr. “[The Historic Study of the Mother Tongue in the United States: A Survey of the Past](#),” *Studies in English*, No. 5 (October 8, 1925), pp. 5 -38; Henneman, J. B. “[The Study of English in the South](#),” *The Sewanee Review* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1894), pp. 180-197; Sims, Edward Dromgoole. “[The Diary of Edward Dromgoole Sims, June 17 – August 2, 1824](#).” *South Carolina Digital Library*. Online. Accessed July 17, 2025.

⁶⁸⁶ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, pp. 190 -191; Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 59.

⁶⁸⁷ James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 69 -70. Haley Laurence, “[How an Alabaman Shaped the History of Photography](#).” Online. Accessed July 17, 2025; Frances Osburn Robb. [Shot in Alabama: A History of Photography, 1839 – 1941](#). Available from Kindle.

be the first produced in Alabama.⁶⁸⁸ By 1850, Harrington was operating McGuire & Harrington on Canal Street in New Orleans, popularizing the printing of daguerrotypes on paper rather than metal plates.⁶⁸⁹ He is said by Clark to have died in New Orleans.

Collins D. Elliott (1810 - 1899). The fifth member of La Grange's first faculty arrived rather accidentally. Born in Ohio in 1810, into the family of an itinerant Methodist minister, and named after the Methodist evangelist John Collins, he entered Augusta College in Kentucky at 17 to prepare for a ministerial career. His attendance was not an insignificant cost, and indications are that he was the only family member to attend college. A trivial anecdote that Elliott confessed is that, unlike the "D" in Edward Sims name, the "D" in his own had no significance. He added the initial while in college, "for no reason" he said, except that it made the initials of his entire name read as "C, D, E."⁶⁹⁰ Graduating with honors in 1829, he excelled in the classics. The standard histories of him have him beginning his career at La Grange College, as Chair of Greek and Latin. However, contemporaneous notes by Robert Paine and others have him appointed somewhat later, with the departure of Edward D. Sims for Randolph-Macon.



63 Collins D. Elliott. La Grange College and Nashville Female Institute

Rather, his first job on the mountain seems to have been either at the LaFayette Academy for Women, working under Daniel Bestor, or working with Sims at the boys' academy. A reasonable explanation would be the latter, as Paine remarks that Sims moved over into the language role as

⁶⁸⁸ "[Joshua Lanier Martin and his wife, Sarah Ann Martin.](#)" Alabama Department of Archives and History. Online. Accessed July 17, 2025.

⁶⁸⁹ "William H. Harrington," [Pioneer American Photographers, 1839 – 1860](#). Online. Accessed July 17, 2025.

⁶⁹⁰ Hale, Will Thomas. [A History of Tennessee and the Tennesseans. The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities](#). Volume 7. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913, pp. 2082 – 2091; Windrow, J. E. and Elliott, C. D. "[Collins D. Elliott and the Nashville Female Academy](#)." *Tennessee Historical Magazine*. Series II. Vol. 3 No. 2 (January 1935), pp. 74-106.

his contract at the boys' school was expiring, and that the need for a preparatory school, which the charter allowed, was resolved by Elliott taking over the preparatory department. Likely, the boys' school *became* the preparatory component of La Grange, with Elliott filling the role as tutor.⁶⁹¹

Biographers note that on his coach journey from Augusta College to La Grange mountain, he carried letters of introduction to prominent Methodists in Nashville, remaining there a couple of weeks. He was an admirer of Andrew Jackson and became a frequent visitor to the Hermitage, and a friend to Dr. Felix Robertson, pioneer founder of the city. During his ten years on the mountain connected with La Grange, he spent his vacations in Nashville, in 1837 marrying Elizabeth (Lizzie) Porterfield who joined him at La Grange, along with two slaves, the property of the bride. An accomplished young woman, she later published a well-received history of her native city.⁶⁹²

In 1832, with Sim's departure for Randolph-Macon, the talented Elliott became professor of ancient languages. He would later accept the mathematics portfolio as well. Rivers writes that Elliott, still unmarried at that time, lived in the main building among the students, seldom finishing his reading before midnight and rising before dawn. The students, relates Rivers, found him always prepared, courteous and sympathetic.⁶⁹³ The son of a Methodist minister, Collins was licensed to preach in 1835, joining the Mississippi Methodist Conference while maintaining his professorial role at La Grange. In 1839, Collins resigned his La Grange professorship and he, Lizzie and their first child moved to Nashville whereupon he was invited to assume oversight of the junior class of the [Nashville Female Academy](#). He served as co-principle of the prestigious academy, the school for the

⁶⁹¹ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, pp. 190 -191; Thomas Fite Paine, Jr. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. "Notes of Life" and "Pictures from My Diary," p. 63

⁶⁹² Hale, Will Thomas. [A History of Tennessee and the Tennesseans. The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities](#). Volume 7. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913, pp. 2082 – 2091. Elizabeth Porterfield Elliott, [Early History of Nashville](#). Nashville: The Board of Education, 1911.

⁶⁹³ Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 41.

wealthy daughters of Southern planters, with Rev. R. A. Lapsley until 1844, when he became principal, serving until the school's closure in 1866.⁶⁹⁴

A passionate pro-slavery advocate and secessionist, he led the school through a period of rapid expansion, accumulating significant personal wealth at the same time, building their mansion, *Boscobel*, in the city. His tenure was not without its conflicts, clashing with Methodist authorities over his assistance in offering dance as part of the Academy curriculum. A long running dispute, the disagreement led to his departure from the Methodist church in 1858 and the loss of his credentials.⁶⁹⁵ Other contretemps that marked his tenure including a passionate opposition to the implementation of public education in Tennessee and the rejection of education as an avenue to female independence. The purpose of education he insisted was to allow the woman "to be a wife, to be a mother."⁶⁹⁶ He died in 1899, the *Christian Advocate* noting "such men as Dr. Elliott will be seen not more. The condition that produced them has passed away."⁶⁹⁷

The Constrained Years.

The early departures of Sims to Randolph-Macon, Hudson to the University of Alabama, and Harrington to a lifelong career in photography, left Robert Paine with big shoes to fill. The Methodist Church helped with that endeavor. Thomas Barbour and William Ellison joined Collins D. Elliott and Paine on the faculty. Elliott assumed the language portfolio of Sims. In 1833, William Ellison was called the mathematics chair to replace Hudson.

Rev. William Holmes Ellison (1805 – 1884), the son of John and Susan Ellison of Orangeburg, SC. After graduating from college, perhaps the

⁶⁹⁴ Windrow, J. E. and Elliott, C. D. "[Collins D. Elliott and the Nashville Female Academy.](#)" Tennessee Historical Magazine. Series II. Vol. 3 No. 2 (January 1935), p. 78; Hale, Will Thomas. [A History of Tennessee and the Tennesseans. The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities.](#) Volume 7. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913, pp. 2082 – 2091.

⁶⁹⁵ Windrow, J. E. and Elliott, C. D. "[Collins D. Elliott and the Nashville Female Academy.](#)" Tennessee Historical Magazine. Series II. Vol. 3 No. 2 (January 1935), p. 86.

⁶⁹⁶ Windrow, J. E. and Elliott, C. D. "[Collins D. Elliott and the Nashville Female Academy.](#)" Tennessee Historical Magazine. Series II. Vol. 3 No. 2 (January 1935), p. 104.

⁶⁹⁷ Quoted in Windrow, J. E. and Elliott, C. D. "[Collins D. Elliott and the Nashville Female Academy.](#)" Tennessee Historical Magazine. Series II. Vol. 3 No. 2 (January 1935), p. 106

University of South Carolina,⁶⁹⁸ Ellison entered the Methodist itinerancy. Ellison had the good fortune to marry well, wedding Anna White Singletary Capers (1814 – 1857) in Charleston, December 23, 1830. His father-in-law was an influential Methodist minister at the time, he had been responsible for missionary work among the slaves of the South Carolina littoral at the time of the marriage, having previously worked among the Creeks of Georgia and Alabama. At the time of the opening at La Grange, Capers held the same chair, Moral Philosophy, at Franklin College in Georgia as Paine did at La Grange.⁶⁹⁹ It can be safely assumed they knew each other; in fact, as seen, Capers may have been one of the other candidates considered for the Presidency of La Grange. In the aftermath of the Methodist schism, an outcome in which both he and Paine had a hand, Capers too would be become a bishop of the Methodist Church South.

Ellison would serve La Grange for four years, leaving in 1836 for [Georgia Female College](#) of [Macon](#), another Methodist institution.⁷⁰⁰ He was described by Rivers, a student during the time of Ellison's tenure, as a good teacher but not a strong scholar. Ellison was an ardent admirer of Paine and once wrote to his father-in-law praising the president's rhetorical style, comparing him to the best in the ranks of the Methodist church.⁷⁰¹ In 1836, the Georgia Female College was chartered in Georgia, and Ellison transferred to the chair of mathematics there. As was the case with Elliott's elite female institution in Nashville, Macon Wesleyan was college to the planter elite of South Georgia when Ellison became its president in 1838. Like Nashville, its purpose was to train the female children of planters and professionals in "[the culture of their class](#)." Bishop James Osgood Andrew, a slaveholder and key to the Methodist schism, was a trustee. After ten years, Ellison would return to Alabama as president of the Chunnenugee Female

⁶⁹⁸ , Richard Henderson. "[Early Methodist Educators](#)," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (July 1890), pp. 228. (*The Biographical Dictionary of America* erroneously has Ellison at the La Grange Female College in Georgia during his time in Alabama).

⁶⁹⁹ Shipp, Albert Micajah. [The History of Methodism in South Carolina](#). Nashville, Southern Methodist Publishing House, n. d., p. 430.

⁷⁰⁰ James Edmonds Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 11; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, p. 168.

⁷⁰¹ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1892, p. 46.

College, a position he held until the outbreak of the Civil War. One son, Capt. James Henry Capers Ellison, would die at Gettysburg. The college would not survive the war, and his postwar years were spent in a return to the Methodist itinerancy until he was superannuated. He died in 1884.⁷⁰²

John McClintock. As was the case with Willbur Fisk's declination of the presidency of La Grange, sometimes it is the path *not* taken by a prospective faculty member that shapes the tenor of an organization. Such may be the case with John McClintock, who after attending Wesleyan, earned his degree in mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1832. Subsequently, he entered the Methodist ministry, filling a small church in New Jersey.⁷⁰³ With the pending departure of Ellison, Robert Paine in late summer 1836, offered young McClintock the Chair of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at a salary of \$900 yearly, a sum the young man found attractive. He would have joined Elliott, Thomas Barbour, and Maffitt on the faculty with Paine had he accepted. He was drawn to the post because of its healthy southern climate, a palliative for his chronic throat condition that plagued him all his life. Further, he told in father by letter, the money and the attraction of teaching college mathematics gave him a clear vision of his future life. It was, however, a long way from home and if there were a position to become available from the college in Carlise, Pennsylvania, he would prefer it.⁷⁰⁴ Remarkably, the offer came through, and McClintock taught at Dickinson College in Carlise from 1836 – 1848. He embraced the Methodist values of temperance and anti-slavery, though he did not regard himself as an abolitionist. In 1847, he was tried and acquitted for his role in the freeing of fugitive slaves in the area. During a long and influential career, he served as editor of *The Methodist Quarterly Review* (1848-1856), as pastor of St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church in New York (1857-60) and was in London and Paris during the Civil War, where it is said he did much to rally public opinion to the support of the Northern cause. Over the years he declined offers of college presidencies, finishing his career

⁷⁰² Miller, Brandi Simpson, "[1836 – 1850: Who We Were](#)" Wesleyan College Archives. Online. Accessed July 22, 2025; Owen, Thomas McAdory. *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*. Vol. III. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921, p. 539.

⁷⁰³ Charles D. Cashdollar. "[Unexpected Friendship: John McClintock and Auguste Comte](#)." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (January 1981), pp. 85 -98. JSTOR.

⁷⁰⁴ George R. Crooks. [Life and Letters of Rev. John M'Clintock, Late President of Drew Theological Seminary](#). New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1876, p. 96.

as head of the Methodist Church's newly established Drew College Seminary from 1867-70, the year of his death.⁷⁰⁵ Offered one writer: "a remarkably versatile scholar, McClintock by his editorial and educational work probably did more than any other man to raise the intellectual tone of American Methodism."⁷⁰⁶ Had he gone to La Grange, he may have served on the faculty with a like-minded Henry Tutwiler.

John Newland Maffitt. For every son of a Supreme Court Justice like Barbour, every frontier college, challenged to validate the credentials of its professors, likely encountered its share of pretenders, rogues and charlatans. Such was Paine's experience with the larger-than-life figure of [John Newland Maffitt](#) (1794 -1850), a shadowy figure who despite his celebrity and notoriety, was hard to place with any certainty on the campus of La Grange, much less categorize his accomplishments there.



64 John Newland Maffitt

Born in Ireland to a Methodist family, married, and forsaking a livelihood as a tailor for life as a Methodist itinerant, he left for the United States in 1819, at the age of 25. He sustained himself in New York initially as an apprentice tailor. But soon he was an immensely popular feature in the Methodist church in the east. One biographer attributes it to style, his Irish bearing, voice, and features appealing to an emerging embrace of middle class refinement among congregationalists. He was, according to one biographer, "the Beau Brummel of preachers," with a striking countenance and fashionable attire, whose sermons, "ornate as the tail of a peacock,"

drew thousands at the height of his fame.⁷⁰⁷ His appeal was immense, preaching to vast crowds at the peak of his fame. The lowly itinerate circuit rider's Methodism had evolved in Maffitt's persona into a faith the nation's

⁷⁰⁵ "[John McClintock \(Theologian\)](#)." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed July 25, 2025.

⁷⁰⁶ "[John McClintock](#)." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1911. Online. Accessed July 25, 2025.

⁷⁰⁷ Cray, Robert E., Jr. "[High Style and Low Morals: John Newland Maffitt and the Methodist Church, 1794 – 1850](#)." *Methodist History*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (November 2006), n. p. (digital edition).

leadership could recognize and accept. In Maffitt, it was said, gentility and Methodism had become one.⁷⁰⁸

But his life was forever tempestuous. His wife and three children who had followed him to New York, proved too great a commitment. His young son, John Newland, Jr., was sent in 1824 to live with his brother in North Carolina, and he eventually divorced his wife, a rarity in that day. By 1835, Maffitt was in Nashville, where he partnered with the Rev. Lewis Garrett to publish the *Western Methodist*, a weekly religious newspaper that transformed into the noted *Christian Advocate*. It was in the pages of the *Western Methodist* that in his florid description of the Tennessee Valley from the precipice of La Grange Mountain, that his first encounter with the college is recorded (June 13, 1834).⁷⁰⁹ The decade of the 30's was a severe fiscal test for Paine, the college, and the Tennessee Methodist Conference. One palliative for the school was the diversion of talented ministers from their itinerancy to the service of La Grange College as agents. From as early 1833, Maffitt shouldered that role, working chiefly in the Atlantic and Eastern states. His cohorts included the redoubtable Littleton Fowler who scoured Louisiana and Arkansas, and T. J. Elliott, who solicited Georgia. Then, about 1836, Paine, embracing the stature and poise of Maffitt, appointed the lightly schooled Maffitt to the chair of Elocution and Belles Lettres.⁷¹⁰ But it is not clear how often he was on campus, and the professorship was discontinued

⁷⁰⁸ Maffitt, John Newland. [*Tears of Contrition: Or Sketches of the Life of John N. Maffitt With Religious and Moral Reflections to which are Appended Several Poetic Infusions.*](#) New York: Samuel Green, 1821; Maffitt, John Newland. [*Literary and Religious Sketches.*](#) New York: T. Harris, 1832. See also McFerrin, John B. [*History of Methodism in Tennessee, Vol. III.*](#) Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church South, 1895, p. 109.

Cray, Robert E., Jr. "[High Style and Low Morals: John Newland Maffitt and the Methodist Church, 1794 – 1850.](#)" *Methodist History*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (November 2006), n. p. (digital edition).

⁷⁰⁹ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College,](#)" *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 4; Cray, Robert E., Jr. "[High Style and Low Morals: John Newland Maffitt and the Methodist Church, 1794 – 1850.](#)" *Methodist History*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (November 2006), n. p. (digital edition). According to one source, the *Western Methodist* was sold to the Methodist Church and morphed into the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, with Rev. Thomas Stringfield as editor. The *Advocate* was the progenitor of the Southern Methodist Publishing House: McFerrin, John B. [*History of Methodism in Tennessee, Vol. III.*](#) Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church South, 1895, p. 109.

⁷¹⁰ Anson West reports he was at the college in that role in 1835 and 1836. Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama.*](#) Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 622.

in 1837⁷¹¹. Maffitt is not mentioned by Richard Henderson Rivers (with whom he may have overlapped), James Edmonds Saunders, or Robert Steen in their recounts of the history of the college. His celebrity still intact after his brief association with La Grange, Maffitt was appointed chaplain of the House of Representatives in 1841. With his departure, the college lost perhaps its most vocal opponent of slavery.⁷¹²

After leaving La Grange and completing his year as chaplain of the House of Representatives, Maffitt's life becomes even foggier. In 1846, after a second marriage to a seventeen-year-old in Brooklyn, there arose a new round of complaints about his character, and he chose to leave the far west, arriving in Arkansas after the Methodist schism, where he earned a new license to preach in the Methodist Church, South. He never regained his early stature and popularity and at the end of his life, was preaching in a small chapel in the outskirts of Mobile, when he died in 1850 at 56.⁷¹³

Having divorced their mother, [Ann](#), it is not clear if he was also estranged from his children, one of whom, [John Newland Maffitt, Jr.](#), was a celebrated Confederate naval officer and blockade runner, and another, [Henrietta](#), was the wife of the President of Texas, Mirabeau Lamar.⁷¹⁴

Henri Masson. Joining the faculty in 1835 at the same time as Barbour, Henri Masson of France became the first professor of modern languages. Said to be gentlemanly, with polished manners, he represented a departure, perhaps even more than Maffitt, from the evangelical mold of the La Grange faculty. A European, he had no fixed religious views, and Paine was anxious to make him into a Protestant, an ambition Masson seemed to enjoy deflecting. On one occasion, when Paine was holding forth of the frauds that were associated with religious relics, Masson elicited a good bit of merriment from the other listeners, when he responded to Paine: "I was in

⁷¹¹ "Maffitt, John Newland." [Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography](#). Vol. 4. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888, p. 172. Personal Digitized copy, Apple Books.

⁷¹² "The day is past, when any attempt may be expected to vindicate slavery; on philosophical or religious principles. It is a horrible wrong, unjustifiable, impeached by every noble feeling that throbs in the bosoms of the collective race of humanity" in his Maffitt, John Newland. [Literary and Religious Sketches](#). New York: T. Harris, 1832, p. 42. [Hathi Trust](#).

⁷¹³ William S. Sprague. [Annals of the American Pulpit: or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations from the early settlement of the country to the close of the year 1855](#). Vol. 7. Methodist. NY: Robert Carter & Bros. 1859, pp. 837 – 841. Internet Archive. Kindle Book Download.

⁷¹⁴ Maffitt, Emma Martin. [The Life and Services of John Newland Maffitt](#). New York: the Neale Publishing Company, 1906

an old church once, and the priest showed me a little vial full of Egyptian darkness.”⁷¹⁵ He would remain on the faculty until 1840, perhaps departing for the University of Alabama and leaving only a light footprint on the history of the college.⁷¹⁶

Thomas Pendelton Barbour (1810 – 1849) filled, in 1835, the chemistry vacancy created after William Harrington resigned the previous year and returned to Florence to practice medicine. Professor Barbour was the son of a U. S. Supreme Court Justice and Speaker of the House of Representatives, [Phillip Barbour](#) – the only person to hold both positions. Several other members of Thomas Barbour’s Virginia family held prominent political posts, and he was related to [Judge Henry Minor](#) of the University of Alabama Board of Trustees⁷¹⁷ Thomas Barbour earned degrees from the University of Virginia and the University of Pennsylvania. He earned his medical credentials at the latter and established a practice in Columbia, Tennessee. It was from Columbia that he accepted the chair of chemistry at La Grange, practicing there for a time to the strong approval of his students. In one of the poignant sidelights of their time on the mountain, Robert Paine lost his first wife, Susanna in 1836: Barbour’s wife, [Sarah Catherine](#), was the loving caregiver to President Paine’s two young children, John and James during a challenging time in his life.⁷¹⁸ Dr. Barbour did not remain long on the mountain, moving by 1842 to St. Louis as a professor of medicine at Kemper College; in 1846 he and the other medical faculty were transferred to the University of Missouri. He served ably until his death of a fierce cholera epidemic that swept the city in 1849, killing ten percent of the population.

⁷¹⁵ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, p. 168.

⁷¹⁶ W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 8; The assertion by Steen that Masson left La Grange for the University of Alabama has not been substantiated. Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 61. His name is not found in the [Register of Officers and Students of the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1901](#) compiled by Thomas Waverly Palmer.

⁷¹⁷ “[Phillip P. Barbour](#)”. Wikipedia. Online. Accessed July 22, 2025.

⁷¹⁸ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1892, pp. 50-51.

His passing was mourned deeply by his college colleagues.⁷¹⁹ Henry Tutwiler would subsequently fill his shoes.

Continuing Financial Plight

From the beginning, La Grange isolated in the foothills of the Cumberlands, lacked the advantages accruing to Catholic Spring Hill in the port city of Mobile, or to the University of Alabama, in the state capital, Tuscaloosa. Fund raising duties fell primarily to the church, to agents who solicited churchgoers across the South.⁷²⁰ As seen, John Newland Maffitt was one of those solicitors, holding the title of General Agent, and writing in the *Western Methodist* in September 1834 of endowment goals:

The college is in debt. It must have additional buildings.

To enable Lagrange to assume an equal standing with similar institutions in the union and place it on permanent ground it will need a fund of \$20,000. Unless this fund can be obtained, it will have to contend for its very existence with contingent circumstances, be rendered incapable of redeeming its pledges to the public and perish to an everlasting disgrace to the Christian community to which she looked for support and patronage.

Funds are needed to lay the foundation of the great university of the south west, a college which shall exert its influence from the Cumberland Mountains to the plains of Texas, from the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico; and like the father of waters, in whose value it is located, roll an ocean of moral and intellectual influence over all that land.⁷²¹

The capital target of \$20,000 announced by Maffitt was twice the initial \$10,000 pledge from the planter elite in the La Grange environs.⁷²² In 1831,

⁷¹⁹ “[Thomas Pendleton Barbour](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed July 22, 2025. Part of this exegesis provided by Chat GPT, July 22, 2025: (**Kemper College** was a short-lived educational institution in **St. Louis, Missouri**, founded in the **early 1840s** by **Episcopalian Bishop Jackson Kemper**. It aimed to combine classical education with theological and professional training. The college struggled financially and eventually closed, but its **medical faculty was absorbed into the University of Missouri's medical department** in 1846); “[1849: The St. Louis Cholera Epidemic](#).” Lafayette Archives. Online. Accessed July 22, 2025; J. Thomas Scharf. [History of Saint Louis City and County, From the Earliest Periods to the Present Day](#). Vol. II. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts & Co. 1883, p. 1533; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 191.

⁷²⁰ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries. Chapter II. Sketch of La Grange College by James Edmonds Saunders, p. 187.

⁷²¹ “[Lagrange College](#).” *Western Methodist*, September 12, 1834, p. 2

⁷²² Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography. Vol. 2](#), 1921, p. 837. Internet Archive. Accessed July 24, 2025.

[Rev. Ebenezer Hearn](#) (1794-1862) was appointed La Grange Agent from the Mississippi Conference, succeeded by Joseph McDowell. Hearn reports traveling through Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee in the successful discharge of his responsibilities. [Rev. William McMahon](#) (1785-1870) was assigned the same role by the Tennessee Conference, serving 1831-33, also traveling into Georgia to fund raise.⁷²³

While academically unschooled, Robert Paine did have other skillsets that served the struggling school in its formative years. As his biographer points out, Paine had started life as a clerk and bookkeeper in frontier Tennessee and came into his role at La Grange with the facility to manage available funds.⁷²⁴ Paine admits in his memoirs that he lacked the classical preparation that would typically be expected of a college president of the times. Certainly, his rude frontier education paled in comparison with the credentials of his counterpart Alva Woods who would soon preside over the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. His education was, he said, “the only kind possible at the time and in that section of the country. It was good as far as it went; and was probably inferior to none [in the Tennessee Conference] at that time.”⁷²⁵ Elsewhere, he reassured himself that his working knowledge of Greek and Latin served him well in both the college role and the ministry, and that when he entered the Tennessee Conference, he was “probably among the best educated young men in it.”⁷²⁶ His biographer, apologist, and presidential successor, Richard Henderson Rivers, insisted that Paine was prepared for the role of frontier college President, having served on the Board of Trustees at Rev. Philip Lindsley’s University of Nashville, becoming familiar with the complexities of administration, as well as having the aforementioned practical background in mercantile bookkeeping that served

⁷²³ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, pp. 442-443.

⁷²⁴ ⁷²⁴, Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1892, p.. 41.

⁷²⁵ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*. Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 61.

⁷²⁶ Paine, Thomas Fite, Jr., M. D. and Grace Benedict Paine, eds. *Notes of Life, and Pictures from my Diary: Bishop Robert Paine, Methodist Episcopal Church South and La Grange College, Alabama*. Nashville, TN: Typewritten Copy, 1974, p. 18

him well at La Grange.⁷²⁷ Ironically, he may not have been the first choice of the Conference. There is anecdotal evidence that [William Capers](#) (1790 - 1855), Methodist presiding elder of the Charleston District at the time, who also declined the position of Chair of Moral Philosophy at Franklin College, Georgia, rejected the opportunity to move to Alabama. Like Paine, he was not classically trained for the work. Closely allied to Paine the philosophical accommodation of slavery, his presidency would not likely have changed the college's trajectory.⁷²⁸ Likewise, [Willbur Fisk](#) (1792 – 1839), a Brown graduate, itinerate Methodist minister, and a founding principal of Wesleyan Academy is also said to have declined the La Grange presidency in 1829, as well as an offer for a professorship at the University of Alabama. In 1830, he would be chosen first President of Wesleyan University, the flagship school of the Methodist faith. An avid supporter of the American Colonization Society, his presence as leader might have encouraged some of the other ACS-supporting faculty to remain on the mountain, altering the values of the college somewhat.⁷²⁹ For the frontier college, Robert Paine, itinerant preacher turned president, would serve as La Grange's helmsman for 16 years. While there, he would abet the splintering of the Methodist church.

Fiscal Struggles. Within a year of opening its doors, President Paine addressed the faithful in the Methodist newspaper *Christian Advocate*, *appealing* for funds without which, he said, the College would not be able to remain in operation.⁷³⁰

At the Methodist Conference of 1832, the conferees congratulated themselves on their higher education accomplishments to date, while at the same time cautioning that the capacity of the denomination to support higher learning may have been reached:

⁷²⁷ Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 41.

⁷²⁸ Albert Micajah Shipp. [The History of Methodism in South Carolina](#). Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, p. 430; "[William Capers](#)," [Museum of History](#), accessed May 28, 2025.

⁷²⁹ [Appleton's' Cyclopedia of American Biography](#). James Grant Wilson, John Fiske, eds. Vol. II. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887. (Fisk has been said to be the first college graduate among American Methodist ministers: Gorrie, P. Douglas. [Episcopal Methodism as it was](#). Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1852, p. 366.).

⁷³⁰ Barnard, Harry V. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1957), pp. 11.

Whereas it is all important to the interests of education in our Church, that the colleges under our patronage should be liberally. endowed and supported; and whereas this cannot possibly be done if the number of such institutions be increased beyond the real wants of our people; therefore,

Resolved, *That the four colleges already established, viz. the Augusta College, in Kentucky; the La Grange College, in Alabama; the Randolph Macon College, in Virginia; and the Wesleyan University, in Connecticut, are quite sufficient for all collegiate purposes among us for the present.*⁷³¹

The infamous [Panic of 1837](#), a financial crisis built on speculative fever, inflicted grave impact across the United States. Over half of the country's 850 banks failed.⁷³² The Panic of hit discretionary spending hard everywhere, and LaGrange College was no exception. Many Methodists and others were forced to default on their pledges to support the college. So badly did things evolve that in 1844, President Paine published in the *South Western Christian Advocate* a threat to sue those who defaulted. However, the threat produced no income stream and did not result in any lawsuits.⁷³³

The growing population the region did not make the task any easier for La Grange, for its of army agents, or for Robert Paine.⁷³⁴ Efforts to fund raise in the state of Georgia, for example, encountered the competing ambitions of the Georgia Conference for a college of its own. As early as 1833, both La Grange and Randolph-Macon had agents before the annual meeting of the Georgia Methodist Conference making pitches for support. But even then, Dr. Ignatius Alphonso Few was leading the effort to establish a school for Methodists *within* Georgia, and the response to the agents' appeals was "was not very large."⁷³⁵ With the establishment of [Emory College](#) in 1836, the trickle of funds from Georgia would cease.⁷³⁶

⁷³¹ [The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, Vol. 14](#), New Series, Vol. 3. New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1832, p. 339. Internet Archive. Accessed July 26, 2025.

⁷³² Damiano, Sara T. (2016). "[The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis](#) by Jessica M. Lepler". *Journal of the Early Republic*. **36** (2): 420–422.

⁷³³ Barnard, Harry V. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1957), pp. 12-13.

⁷³⁴ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 443. Internet Archive.

⁷⁴⁵ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), pp. 18.

⁷³⁶ Smith, George Gilman. [The History of Methodism in Georgia and Florida: From 1785 to 1865](#). Macon: Jno. W. Burke & Co., 1877, p. 503; Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D.](#)

In 1836, to bolster the sinking fiscal fortunes of La Grange, the Board of Trustees ratified an effort by the Tennessee Conference to raise an education fund which would be administered by the Board. The Board would guarantee five percent return on the fund, and it would be used for tuition and board of sons of deceased ministers, sons of local preachers and others the conference judged deserving.⁷³⁷ By policy, ministers' sons could attend free, and any endowment would help offset those costs. The Alabama Conference, organized in 1832, also had funds directed toward the education of the sons of ministers, and for a while some of those resources came La Grange's way.⁷³⁸

The crash of 1837 has been called America's first "Great Depression", and the effects were felt for several years.⁷³⁹ In the fall of 1839, in order to aid a wobbly La Grange, Governor Babgy futilely appealed to the Alabama Legislature for help:

*While upon the subject of education, I would beg leave to call your attention to two colleges of great promise, and which, from the praiseworthy exertion they have made, the respectable standing to which they have advanced and the great amount of good they have already done, and the much greater amount they promise to do, I beg leave to recommend the most favorable consideration of the Legislature. I allude to the Colleges at La Grange in Franklin County, and Madison in Perry County. These institutions went into operation some time since, and in consequence of the sudden and unexpected change that took place shortly afterwards, in the pecuninary affairs of the country, they have not received from individual and private contributin the amount necessary to give that extensive usefulness to the operation, which their very respectable founders anticipated. I should therefore be much gratified if the Legislature should feel authorized to aid them in such an amount and upon such terms, as in their wisdom may be calculated to afford them some relief.*⁷⁴⁰

[*Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 64. Internet Archive.

⁷³⁷ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), pp. 18.

⁷³⁸ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 728. Internet Archive.

⁷³⁹ Roberts, Alasdair. [*America's First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder after the Panic of 1837*](#). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. Digital Edition. Apple Books.

⁷⁴⁰ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 18. Available in Hathi Trust.

One forlorn effort to raise funds for the school emerged from the fact that Tennessee Valley cotton all had to make its way to market via steamboat and the Mississippi River prior to the construction of the Memphis and Charleston railroad, which opened another possibility. An enterprising New Orleans cotton brokerage offered the possibility of an endowment of possibly \$50,000 to La Grange College paid over five years – if Methodist planters in the Valley would send their cotton to the broker to be sold. The name of the brokerage Sledge & McKennon suggests a familial relationship with the trustee, Alexander Sledge, but that has not been established. Sadly, very little seems to have arisen from the initiative.⁷⁴¹

In the end, every faculty member of the college shared in the struggles to stay afloat. Richard Henderson Rivers recounts there were years in which Paine would return one thousand dollars of his annual compensation to the college coffers, retaining only \$800 to sustain his family. Following his example, other faculty, including Rivers during his tenure, returned \$2-300 of their own more modest compensation, “and thus saved the institution”.⁷⁴² In the midst of the early fiscal struggles, President Paine lost his wife, Susanna Beck Paine, in June, 1836, after she wintered over in the home of her father. Attending graduation, Paine hurried to Nashville to be with her for a few days before her passing. Their two sons, John and James, fell to his care. In his carriage, walk and voice, noted his biographer Rivers, his bereavement was apparent to everyone on campus.⁷⁴³

Within a year, Robert Paine had remarried. His second wife was [Amanda Malvina Shaw](#) (1813 – 1838), reportedly the daughter of a Presbyterian minister from the environs of Columbia, Tennessee, the home town of La Grange’s chemistry professor, Thomas Barbour. Little is known

⁷⁴¹ Duke, B. M. “Easy and Cheap Method of Endowing LaGrange College.”

Christian Advocate and Journal, June 21, 1833, p. 7. Accessible online via ProQuest, p. 169.

⁷⁴² Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 66. Internet Archive; Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 51; Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson* . Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 8. Library. Archives.

⁷⁴³ Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 50. Internet Archive; see Maria J. McInstosh’s 1853 novel, [The Lofty and the Lowly, or Good in All and None All Good](#) for the depiction of a planter family confronting bankruptcy and ruin in aftermath of the Panic of 1837.

of Amanda, and the two had no children before her untimely death. Columbia is but a short distance from the Paine home in Giles county, so it is possible the families were earlier acquainted. In his biography of Paine, Rivers mentions Amanda only in passing, and no record of her father's service to the Presbyterian church has been located.⁷⁴⁴ Amanda is interred in the small La Grange cemetery on the mountain.⁷⁴⁵

With two small children at home, and a college to run, Robert Paine would soon marry a third time. Certainly, his third marriage more accurately mirrors the opportunistic liaison of his first. It is necessary only to recall that Susanna Beck was the granddaughter of of the lion of frontier Tennessee and Nashville founder, General Robertson, that her father was a prominent attorney in that city, and that shortly after their marriage, the itinerant minister Paine was assigned by the church to a prominent church in Nashville.⁷⁴⁶ His third wife, Mary Elizabeth Millwater (1822 – 1904), was an equally strategic choice. Liza was the daughter of [Henrietta Weeden Millwater Saunders](#) (1794 – 1869), whom the President of the La Grange Board of Trustees, Turner Saunders, married in 1826.⁷⁴⁷ The two were married in 1839, when she was but 17. They would have seven children.⁷⁴⁸ The Saunders and Paine families would remain close, Turner and Robert both relocating to Aberdeen, Mississippi after the latter's departure from La Grange College.⁷⁴⁹ At least from the time of the the move to Mississippi, if not from the marriage in 1839, Robert Paine, Methodist minister, college president and future bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South

⁷⁴⁴ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 59.

⁷⁴⁵ "[La Grange Cemetery, Leighton, Colbert County, Alabama, USA](#)". *Find a Grave*.

⁷⁴⁶ Brown, Lavinia R. (Hill). "[The Family of General James Robertson](#)," *The American Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1896), pp. 174 – 188

⁷⁴⁷ Saunders, James Edmonds and Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 362.

⁷⁴⁸ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 60. The [children were](#) sons Robert (1848 – 1895), John Emory (1851 – 1875), George Carter (1855 -1936) and Dr. William "Willy" McKendree (1857 – 1913) and daughters Sarah, Ludie (1848 – 1923), and Mary (1849 – 1888).

⁷⁴⁹ Saunders, James Edmonds and Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 329.

became a slaveholder; recordings indicated the ownership of a 3100 acre plantation and 52 slaves.⁷⁵⁰

In the meantime, activities in the Tennessee Valley were proceeding with disruptive pace. As seen, the signature legislative action of the time was Jackson's Indian Removal Act, passed in the same year that La Grange College was opened. The prospect of the education of indigenous youth on the campus, implicit in the membership of LeFlore and Ross on the board, and in the former's negotiation of funds to send family to the school were soon rendered moot.⁷⁵¹ Although LeFlore remained in Mississippi, becoming a wealthy planter and member of the state legislature, most of the Choctaw departed for Oklahoma between 1831 and 1833. George Colbert and the Chickasaw followed suit, albeit not without physical protests in the streets of Tuscumbia by the Chickasaw leader and petitions by his brother Levi and other chieftans protesting the injustice of the dislocation.⁷⁵² By 1838, the Tennessee Valley was largely empty of the Chickasaw, authors of much of the early history of the region. The Alabama Creeks would prove more intractable, their resistance flaring into renewed violence in South Alabama before their enforced removal in 1836-37, the cleansing culminating in the death of hundreds en route west with the sinking of the steamship [Monmouth](#).⁷⁵³ In those same cruel years, the Cherokee trail of tears could be viewed by students from the promontory of the La Grange mountain, with some of the tribe transported involuntarily down the Tuscumbia, Courtland, Decatur railroad to river vessels awaiting below the Muscle Shoals.⁷⁵⁴ In those first years of the College, the Tennessee Valley and Alabama were ridden of their indigenous peoples and their lands expropriated. The cotton slave economy would soon reach its zenith.

⁷⁵⁰ "[Robert Paine, G-70](#)". Historical Marker. North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Accessed October 14, 2025.

⁷⁵¹ Davis, Ethan. "[An Administrative Trail of Tears: Indian Removal](#)," *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2008-10), pp. 49 -100.

⁷⁵² Wyatt F. Jeltz. "[The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians](#)," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 1948), pp. 24 -37

⁷⁵³ The Emigrating Indians." *Niles National Register*, Nov. 18, 1837, p. 178.

⁷⁵⁴ Perdue, Theda and Green, Michael D. [The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears](#). New York: Penguin Library of American History by Viking, 2007, p. 122.

Chapter 7

Early 19th Century College Lifestyle

In 1830, Alabama was still a rugged place, and families found an education for their children as best they could, with home-schooling often being the only option. The memory of the immigrants of a educational heritage in the older Southern states, was largely that of private schools and academies, operating independently of any State action. Where the southern states exercised any authority, it would be to incorporate the local school, giving its trustees a legal existence and bestowing upon them the full powers to maintain a school.⁷⁵⁵

John Allan Wyeth's experiences obtaining schooling in Marshall County serves as a typical illustration.

At five years of age, I was taken to school; and here again fright comes in, for I doubt if any wretch riding toward the guillotine ever suffered more than did this victim of civilization on this occasion. The teacher who preceded the present incumbent had not spared the rod; in fact, had whipped two of his boy pupils so severely that his services were dispensed with. Hearing all this from the older children, I supposed I would come in for my share from the new man, who was "part Cherokee." "Mr. Dave" was, however, a mild-mannered man, and, while he kept a long hickory switch in the chimney corner near his chair, it was only a reminder of the possibilities which might follow bad behavior. The worst he ever did was to "thump" us on the head with the last knuckle of one finger, and usually we got this punishment for misspelling a word or for some shortcoming in our studies. My first, and I believe only, experience came within a day or two after I began.⁷⁵⁶

In her travels through Alabama in 1835, Harriet Martineau marveled over the expenses required to maintain a family in a frontier situation where essentials were imported overland at great costs from far away. Everyone in the family had to work on the farm or plantation to make ends meet, and education took a back seat to coarser priorities. "The sons," said Martineau, "take land and buy slaves very early; and the daughters marry almost in

⁷⁵⁵ Stephen B. Weeks. [*History of Public Education in Alabama*](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913., p. 16. Internet Archive.

⁷⁵⁶ Wyeth, John Allan. [*With Sabre and Scalpel: The Autobiography of a Soldier and a Surgeon*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914, p. 7.

childhood; so that education is less thought of, and sooner ended, than in almost any part of the world.”⁷⁵⁷ Coinciding with what Paine perceived of the preparedness of his prospective students on that opening day on La Grange mountain, Martineau saw a frontier state at large:

*The pioneers of civilization, as the settlers in these new districts may be regarded, care for other things more than for education; or they would not come. They are, from whatever motive, money-getters; and few but money-getting qualifications are to be looked for in them. It was partly amusing, and partly sad, to observe the young people of these regions; some, fit for a better mode of life, discontented; some youths pedantic, some maidens romantic, to a degree which makes the stranger almost doubt the reality of the scenes and personages before his eyes. The few better educated who come to get money, see the absurdity, and feel the wearisomeness of this kind of literary cultivation; but the being in such society is the tax they must pay for making haste to be rich.*⁷⁵⁸

The students at La Grange College and the University of Alabama reflected the lifestyle on the frontier from which they made their way to the two campuses. Most of the students came from the wealthy planter and mercantile class, were raised in affluent idleness and, in the words of one chronicler, “knew nothing of authority higher than their own.”⁷⁵⁹

Campus Lifestyles.

In their college dormitories and away from family for the first time, academics, study, composition, and free time filled the students’ lives. At La Grange, the diversions were as simple as swimming and bathing in the deep stream near the college. There was bowling on the green, and walks in the woodlands, sometimes in the company of the young women from the Lafayette Institute. At La Grange, there was some permissiveness in time away from campus. Thomas Hobbs describes on outing with his

⁷⁵⁷ Harriet Martineau. [Society in America](#). 2 vols. New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837. Vol. 1, p. 221.

⁷⁵⁸ Harriet Martineau. [Society in America](#). 2 vols. New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837. Vol. 1, p. 221.

⁷⁵⁹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 13.

bosom friends traveling from household to household, serenading the occupants. Turner Saunders and David Taliaferro often joined in in the entertainment. In one instance, he recalls, they were preceded by another set of classmates, equipped with [Jew's harp](#), cymbals, and drum that provided their own effort at entertainment that he described as inferior. More furtively, he said, there was also dancing on the bluff away from the homes, where the students cavorted with the mountain ladies.⁷⁶⁰

Likewise, in Tuscaloosa, hunting, fishing and swimming in the Black Warrior River shoals on a Saturday afternoon was a favorite student pastime. George Little recalled saving another student from drowning there once.⁷⁶¹ One University of Alabama student recalls going hunting with Dr. Garland and bagging a pheasant; another was invited to join Professor Tuomey for a ride in his two-horse carriage, which he reported was the beginning of a life-long friendship.⁷⁶² After graduating from La Grange, Hobbs studied law in Philadelphia and one weekend he and his friends, made arrangements for a fly-fishing trip on the Delaware River Gap through the Blue Ridge about 80 miles north of the city. Their rural host and his "bad-tempered wife" kept them in their inn. It was an excellent fishing trip, and Hobbs mastered the art of taking perch on fly rod and dual-hooked lines. He notes they feasted on fresh fish and wild berry pies prepared by their backwoods hosts. Some of the neighbors joined the innkeeper and the fishermen in the evening, and Hobbs' friend played the fiddle while they danced. Hobbs, Methodist to the core, notes in his diary that he eschewed the dancing, remaining in his room and reading books.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰ Watts, Charles. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 71; [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 20.

⁷⁶¹ Little, George. [Memoirs of George Little](#). Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1924, p. 15. Hathi Trust.

⁷⁶² James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama.](#) Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 136.

⁷⁶³ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862](#)

In contrast, the more urban opportunities of Tuscaloosa afforded the students more freedom. There were also the behavioral injunctions typical of the time. By trustee edict, from the opening of the university, dancing, at least in public settings, was forbidden and students were subject to suspension or even dismissal for the act. Yet Oran Roberts in his *Reminiscences* recounts attending a dancing school in a Tuscaloosa hotel with other students. He found it socially liberating, enabling him and the others to meet women from the nearby Methodist school, a recollection that George Little also fondly recounted. The rules were said to remain in place in the years after Roberts' graduation but were also enforced with increasingly less rigor.⁷⁶⁴

Among the other games enjoyed by the students may have been a forerunner of baseball the students called "[cat](#)." He wrote of playing the game as a 14-year old in Athens, a few years before arriving on campus.⁷⁶⁵ In Tuscaloosa, one of the students, George Little, said that the favorite sport of students was "town ball." Like cat or baseball, it was played with a soft rubber ball, and the runner was "out" if hit by the ball while running between bases.⁷⁶⁶ Hobbs also reported playing a game called "[shinny](#)" or "bandy". Typically, the game was played in the upper United States and in Europe on ice, with either a ball or puck. With a ball, however, it could also be played on turf, as a version of field hockey. He also wrote of walking

[When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 86.

⁷⁶⁴ Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836.* Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript; Little, George. [Memoirs of George Little.](#) Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1924, p. 14 Hathi Trust; James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama.](#) Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 138.

⁷⁶⁵ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 9.

⁷⁶⁶ James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama.](#) Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 136; Little, George. [Memoirs of George Little.](#) Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1924, p. 14. Hathi Trust.

over to one of the nearby buildings that he called “old Academy” and joining in a game of [nine pins](#), which he described as more difficult than he imagined.⁷⁶⁷

On January 22, 1844, the campus held a procession in honor of George Washington’s birthday. Other festivities included “transparencies”—perhaps lantern transparencies, and “turpentine balls” which must have been primitive versions of sparklers or other fireworks. Hobbs recounted that one such flaming ball, flung into the sky, ended up on the wooden shingles of the “College” and he and a classmate, Munson, had to go onto the roof, retrieve it and extinguish the burning shingles. The transparencies or [lantern show](#) remained novel enough for Hobbs to remark about them in preparation for convocation on the 31st of May.⁷⁶⁸

On occasion, there were socials on the mountain. In the spring of 1845, Robert and Mary “Eliza” Paine held a social at which several women from the Lafayette Female Academy were in attendance, along with members of the college senior class. A platter of iced hearts with the women’s names on them drew the attention of the seniors. Thomas Hobbs wrote in his diary that he drew the names of Catherine Kennerly and Maria Oliver. In other visits to their home, he wrote of telling the women’s fortunes, playing the guitar, and even engaging in political discussions.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁷ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 26.

⁷⁶⁸ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 21, 28, 29.

⁷⁶⁹ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 16, 20.

⁷⁶⁹ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama.*](#) Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 136.

Thomas Hobbs had an eye for pretty women, and in one letter home, wrote of being in the company of 15 interesting, attractive young ladies.⁷⁷⁰

Trips off campus were occasionally possible. Once, Thomas Hobbs and some friends chartered a wagon for a trip into Florence for a barbeque. On the way, they navigated the half-mile long bridge across the Tennessee, noting damage from lightening, and observing the modest steamboat, the *Muscle*, making its way along the river. Along the way an [“Indian mound”](#) was passed, but young student Hobbs knew nothing of its origins. The wagon ride brought them to the barbeque at a creek near Florence where they were treated to a speech by the state senator from Limestone Country lambasting the Whig Party, which had some standing in the region. The barbeque dinner was enjoyed by the boys, as was the small cannon salute, 26 shots for the United States, and one for Texas. Hobbs was struck by the free-flowing alcohol and the willingness of the candidates to pay for votes. On the way back in the stagecoach or wagon, one drunken student fell from the conveyance and crushed a foot beneath a wheel. A bath in the river brought relief from the hot afternoon. The coach returned to campus about 8 in the evening.⁷⁷¹ In another instance, Hobbs went into Tuscumbia and voted for Lewis Garrett, the former *Western Methodist* editor, who sent three wagons to campus to fetch student voters, for whom presence at the polls seemed to be the only qualification for casting a ballot. Hobbs recounts that in the wagons were several Germans who took their franchise rights very seriously as they lacked such prerogatives in their native culture. Hobbs evinced a mild amusement with their dedication. Interestingly, it appears that the Germans were brought to the mountain of La Grange by the Immigration and Colonization societies, part of a broader attempt to introduce free labor into the South. On another occasion, Hobbs reported traveling to Tuscumbia to vote for J. K. Ferguson for the militia title of Colonel. Hobbs calculated that Ferguson paid \$40 for a like number of votes, a price Hobbs regarded as dear.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), pp. 72-73.

⁷⁷¹ Watts, Charles. “Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 71.

⁷⁷² [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 14

Sundays typically were quieter days. Students were required to attend church on Sunday as well as prayer service morning and evening during the week.⁷⁷³ One spring Sunday, 1845, Hobbs and his friend Thomas Maddin walked the five miles to Leighton to listen to President Paine preach a two hour sermon, walking subsequently to the Hurley home for dinner. All three of the Hurley males, Edward, James Henry, and David Roberts were students at the college. Afterwards, they walked back to La Grange, Hobbs hobbling badly in ill-fitting shoes.⁷⁷⁴ Sundays were slow-moving everywhere. For Thomas Hill Malone, who attended the University of Virginia after his time at La Grange, Sundays often began with services at the Charlottesville Episcopal Church, in the company of Dr. John Barbee Minor, one of his professors. Later he would return to the Lawn and nap and then he would call upon some of the families in Charlottesville to visit some of his “girlfriends.”⁷⁷⁵

Literary and Debating Societies.

On the intellectual side of their student lives, campus literary societies played an important role in preparing students for adulthood. For fifty years the debating societies spawned from political interests born of revolution and the birth of a new nation were perhaps the defining force in student life.⁷⁷⁶ From their beginning at Yale, Harvard, and other northern colleges, literary societies spread across the southern states, Virginia, North Carolina and down. Naturally they assumed many of the essential features

⁷⁷³ Harry V. Barnard. “La Grange College: A Historical Sketch.” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988), p. 11

⁷⁷⁴ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 25.

⁷⁷⁵ Moore, John H. “[The Old Dominion Through Student Eyes, 1852-1855: The Reminiscences of Thomas Hill Malone.](#)” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 1963), pp. 294 – 326. (Malone was a student at LaGrange for 3 years before enrolling at UVa).

⁷⁷⁶ Sheldon, Henry D. [*Student Life and Customs.*](#) New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1901, p. 125. Online. Kindle download; Dorn, Charles. [*For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America.*](#) Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017, p. 23.

of their earlier northern counterparts. They could be found at both the state universities like Alabama and the sectarian colleges like La Grange.⁷⁷⁷ On the college campuses of the day, the literary societies under the umbrella of college regulations functioned as student-run independent entities, with their own laws and administrations elected by the students.⁷⁷⁸ The Washington and Jefferson Societies were at the center of student life at the University of Virginia, the Dialectic and Philanthropic at the University of North Carolina. At La Grange College, the two literary societies were the *Lafayette* and the *Dialectical*. As was the case at other universities, the two societies were great rivals at La Grange, and their meetings were heavily attended, the anticipated “events of the week.” Officers were the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and Librarian, and they were elected regularly by the members. Every student belonged to one or the other, and while there was a sort of fraternity “rush” the students were permitted to make their choice of societies. Purportedly, the rush period featured episodic high jinks and minor acts of violence or hazing. Professors were elected as honorary members, often attended meetings and occasionally participated in the debates.

Essential to the debate and oratorical roles of the literary societies were their libraries, and on almost every college, the literary societies had their own libraries in addition to the college library.⁷⁷⁹ At La Grange, the rooms of the Dialectical and Lafayette Societies shared a floor with the college library, the former spaces also serving as recital spaces as required. Often, the society libraries held resources that equaled the college library holdings in number. In one report, the La Grange Library was listed at 3,000 volumes, compared to the University of Alabama’s total of about

⁷⁷⁷ Harding, Thomas Spencer. *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815 – 1876*. Ph. D. Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, p. 162. Accessible via ProQuest. Kindle download.

⁷⁷⁸ Harding, Thomas Spencer. [*College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815 – 1876*](#). Ph. D. Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, p. 2. Accessible via ProQuest. Kindle download.

⁷⁷⁹ Dorn, Charles. [*For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America*](#). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017, p. 24.

4,500 (plus another 2,600 in the libraries of the literary societies.⁷⁸⁰ So, it can be assumed that in these formative years, the library resources were roughly comparable. Even in difficult economic times following the Panic of 1837, volumes were still being added. Thomas Hobbs wrote in his journal one April that 90 volumes were being shipped, at a cost of \$130.⁷⁸¹

Society meetings took place on Saturdays “at first candlelight.” Parliamentary law prevailed, time limits for speeches were set, and speakers were often forcibly silenced by gavel. Non-participation could be punished by a fine. After the evening debate, a topic for the next meeting was chosen and champions for each side were selected. Libraries were essential for the functions of oratory and debate. At the University of North Carolina, the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies began building their libraries soon after they were constitutionally organized and by 1812 had collections of 800 to 1,000 volumes.⁷⁸² It was not uncommon for college literary societies to have libraries the equal of the main college library.⁷⁸³

At La Grange each society had libraries of 1,500 books or so, and those were used when the libraries opened at 1 PM on Saturday to prepare for the evening debate. By 1842, those libraries had each grown to more than 2,000 volumes. Selected debate “champions” used the libraries to prepare in advance; books could be checked out for two weeks at a time. The society halls were carpeted and tastefully furnished; there was an element of competitiveness between the two societies regarding hall appearance. Hobbs recalls that one occasion, President Paine returned from the 1845 Methodist Conference meeting in Louisville, where he had a

⁷⁸⁰ Jewett, Charles C. [*Notices of Public Libraries of the United States of America*](#). Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1851. Printed for the House of Representatives, p. 159-160.

⁷⁸¹ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 25.

⁷⁸² Harding, Thomas Spencer. [*College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815 – 1876*](#). Ph. D. Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, p. 164. Accessible via ProQuest. Kindle download.

⁷⁸³ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 80-81.

hand in splitting the Church into northern and southern parts, with curtains for the Lafayette Society rooms for which he paid \$70. Its members appointed a working group to install them before the upcoming convocation.⁷⁸⁴

Like all the literary societies across the country, bright young men preparing for leadership roles were interested what they deemed to be the pressing local and national issues of the Jacksonian era. They did not shy from difficult topics, even if they indulged in a distinctive Southern cultural bias to their arguments. The topics intrigued Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, as they did many in the societies, and he cataloged almost all of them in his journals. In his first year, the topics included two that would be timely in dormitory circles today: "Should Capital Punishment be Imposed for Any Crime," and "Should Foreigner be Allowed to Vote." In August 1844 the debate topic was "Whether Foreign Immigration Should Be Prohibited." Hobbs noted that he personally supported that proposition, but was assigned to the negative, and his argument prevailed. Another debate question was "Should the Poor Be Supported by Law". Hobbs noted in that he was responsible for the question carrying for the affirmative, when in speaking from the negative, he admitted that such poor laws were beneficial in England. At least twice in his time, the question of slavery was debated. In October 1844, Hobbs took the affirmative in debating the proposition of whether slavery was justifiable; he was opposed by Thomas Maddin, who would become one of the founders of the medical school at Vanderbilt University, but his side carried the day. On April 17, 1845, senior Thomas Hobbs was elected President of the Literary Society. As one of his first acts, he fined William Banks and another student for failing to remove their hats. Banks would also become a practicing physician. In March Hobbs himself had been fined 12 ½ cents for "disorder."⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁴ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 28.

⁷⁸⁵ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He*](#)

The motto of the Dialectical Society was "*Vivamus augerer momentum*": "Let us live to improve the moment". And for the Lafayette: "*Grandeur, par difficulties, ceil par peite*:" "Grandeur through difficulty, heaven through piety." Badges and sashes were worn by the members. The Lafayette colors were red or pink and white; the colors of the Dialectical were blue. Members who purchased them also sported gold medallions with the initials of their respective literary societies. The anniversary dates of the two societies celebrated the birthdates of Lafayette and Washington respectively. McGregor relates that relations between the two societies were often factious and sometimes faculty intervention was required to avert physical altercation.⁷⁸⁶ A visitor described their competition toward the end of the session on December 12, 1839. La Grange's own college band played as a procession of students wearing the society badges entered the church. After opening prayer by Robert Paine, the students were addressed by fellow students on the following topics: John S. Kennedy from Florence: "The Triumphs of the Intellect;" Thomas C. Macklin of Limestone County: "American Literature and Its Impediments;" Johnson C. Williams from Carrollton, Mississippi: "Chivalry," and Andrew C. Pickett. Limestone County AL. "Poland." After the addresses, the band played "home sweet home" and the students adjourned for the holidays until January 20, 1840.⁷⁸⁷ As a senior, Tom Macklin again addressed his colleagues at graduation, this time as a senior, and offering the "Latin Salutatory". Benjamin Moore from Talladega offered the valedictory. Henry C. Jones from Franklin, spoke on the "Spirit of Democracy," and Thomas Price of Washington, Mississippi treated "Persia." Thaddeus Kidd of Chambers, Alabama treated the sweeping topic of "History." From La Grange itself, Richard H. Wister led the audience in

[*Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 12-15, 25;

⁷⁸⁶ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 81-82; Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch.](#)" *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, p. 16.

⁷⁸⁷ Walter B. Posey. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)". *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 13; *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, January 4, 1840.

an “Inquiry into the Means of Promoting the Interests of the South,” and Pleasant Eckles from Memphis concluded the addresses with his treatment of “Commerce.”⁷⁸⁸

Spring Hill College had the Philomatic and Eurodelphian Societies.⁷⁸⁹ At the University of Alabama, the counterpart literary societies were the Erosophic and Philomathic. Oran Roberts, the future governor of Texas, was elected president of the Erosophic Society at the end of his junior year. And like so many others, he found the training received in the literary society to serve him well in future years. To better conduct its meetings, he was required to familiarize himself with the rules of *Jefferson’s Manual*, and he found the experience of the debates themselves vital to his future success. His best friend at college was [Franklin Bowden](#), who will feature in certain escapades, below. And as Roberts recounts, they were both served well by their *Erosophic* debates in their subsequent Texas careers:

*During that session Bowden and I, by previous agreement, selected different sides upon the subjects debated, prepared ourselves in advance, and closed nearly every debate after those members of the Society, who had been selected as they stood upon the roll, had completed their speeches. Many years afterwards he and I met in the Courts of Texas, and being employed on different sides of important suits, spoke against each other again.*⁷⁹⁰

No less an academic luminary than [F. A. P. Barnard](#), whose credentials burnished the universities of Alabama, Mississippi and Columbia, affirmed that the skills developed in thinking, writing and speaking that he gained as a member of his literary society at Yale were perhaps the most beneficial assets he developed as a student.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁸ Walter B. Posey. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#)”. *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 15.

⁷⁸⁹ Harding, Thomas Spencer. [College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815 – 1876](#). Ph. D. Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, pp. 324-25. Accessible via ProQuest. Kindle download.

⁷⁹⁰ James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vol 1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., pp. 175 – 179.

⁷⁹¹ Sack, Saul. “[Student Life in the Nineteenth Century](#)”. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol 85, No. 3. July 1961, pp. 255-288. Kindle download.

In summary, it can be suggested that in this interval before fraternities and intercollegiate athletics assumed primacy of place on university campuses, the champions of the literary society debate teams were the most influential students on campus. The advent of the fraternities would be a key to the dimming of their prominence.⁷⁹²

Secret Societies.

While the literary societies at LaGrange and Tuscaloosa were the preeminent student organizations of their respective campuses—providing every student with a form of social and intellectual membership and operating with minimal faculty intervention—they were not the only extracurricular communities to shape student life. At LaGrange College, four secret organizations emerged over time. These groups—*Kuklos Adelphon*, *Philomathean*, *Amae*, and *The B*—served as precursors to modern collegiate fraternities. Unlike the inclusive literary societies, these were highly selective, invitation-only societies.

The first three—*Kuklos Adelphon*, *Philomathean*, and *Amae*—tended to recruit the most disciplined and socially prominent students. *The B*, by contrast, was known for its irreverence and rowdiness. Documentation of these early societies is limited. What little we know comes primarily from the diary of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs and a brief mention in Harry V. Barnard's *LaGrange College: A Historical Sketch* (1957).⁷⁹³ With the aid of other scholarly findings, a tentative reconstruction follows:

Kuklos Adelphon (Κύκλος Ἀδελφῶν) Founded in North Carolina in 1812 by members of *Phi Beta Kappa*, *Kuklos Adelphon* was perhaps the earliest and most widespread collegiate secret society in the South prior to

⁷⁹² Harding, Thomas Spencer. [*College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815 – 1876*](#). Ph. D. Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, p. 197; Accessible via ProQuest. Kindle download. James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vol 1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., pp. 175 – 179; Sack, Saul. “[Student Life in the Nineteenth Century](#)”. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol 85, No. 3. July 1961, pp. 255-288. Kindle download.

⁷⁹³ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976

the Civil War. According to Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities, the society had chapters or "circles" at 21 institutions.⁷⁹⁴ A La Grange chapter was established in 1842.⁷⁹⁵ Beyond campuses, some Kuklos Adelpheon circles extended into the lay professional and gentry classes in county seats across the South.

The society dissolved between 1855 and 1866, with some scholars suggesting that it influenced—if indirectly—the founding culture of the postwar Ku Klux Klan.⁷⁹⁶ While not a direct line, Kuklos Adelpheon has been linked to the origins of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War.⁷⁹⁷ At La Grange, Thomas Hobbs was a member of *Kuklos Adelpheon* and would routinely direct some of his time to its affairs. On Washington's Birthday January 22, 1844, the campus held a night parade, and Hobbs wore both his LaFayette Society Medal and his *Kuklos Adelpheon* medal. The former was described as a "ribbon and rose", the latter as "a silver pendant."⁷⁹⁸ Daniel Coleman

⁷⁹⁴ William E. Mockler. "[The Source of 'Ku Klux'](#)". *Names: Journal of the American Name Society*. III. 1955, p. 16.

⁷⁹⁵ Boyd, Leroy Stafford. "[The Original Kappa Alpha](#)." Reprinted from Banta's Greek Exchange, Vol. VII, No. 4 (September 1919).

⁷⁹⁶ Horn, Stanley F. [Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan, 1966 – 1871](#). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939, p. 11; Davis, Susan Lawrence. [Authentic History of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865 – 1877](#). New York: Susan Lawrence Davis, Publisher, 1924, pp. 7, 73.

⁷⁹⁷ The name "Ku Klux Klan" is widely understood to derive from the Greek word *kyklos* (κύκλος), meaning "circle" or "band," combined with "Klan" to create a martial-sounding alliteration. This etymology closely mirrors the name of the antebellum Southern fraternity *Kuklos Adelpheon* ("Circle of Brothers"), founded in 1812 and active at numerous Southern colleges, including La Grange. While there is no formal institutional link, the Klan's founders—many of whom were educated Confederate veterans—would likely have been familiar with Kuklos Adelpheon's name, structure, and cultural ethos. The fraternity's model of secret chapters, symbolic rituals, and elite membership parallels the Klan's early organization, making Kuklos Adelpheon a likely cultural antecedent. See: Allen W. Trelease, [White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction](#) New York: Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 4, 5, 21.

⁷⁹⁸ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 20; Watts, Charles. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 63; Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988), p. 11.

of Athens, Alabama was also a *Kuklos Adelphon* member at La Grange.⁷⁹⁹ The chapter would relocate with the college to Florence in 1855.⁸⁰⁰

The Philomathean Society is closely associated with the University of Pennsylvania, where it was established in 1813.⁸⁰¹ A literary society *par excellence* its stated goal was to “promote the learning of its members and to increase the academic prestige of the University.”⁸⁰² Several other literary societies shared the society’s name, including Erskine College (1842), the University of Virginia (1849), and Catawba College (1851). The precise date the society was established at La Grange is not known. Whether it was connected to the Penn prototype or formed independently in the same spirit remains unclear.⁸⁰³

The most enigmatic of the LaGrange secret societies is *Amae*, mentioned only in passing by historian Harry V. Barnard in his 1957 sketch, where he reports its presence on campus prior to 1849.⁸⁰⁴ The reference stands isolated in the secondary literature, with no corroborating records in Baird’s *Manual of American College Fraternities*, contemporary college catalogues, or Methodist Episcopal Church reports. Prior to the proliferation of Greek-letter fraternities in the South (post-1840), student societies at religious and classical institutions often adopted Latin mottoes represented by initials. These societies were semi-secret, morally upright, and focused on literary performance, debate, and mutual improvement. Until more is known, it is a likelihood that the “*Amae*” in Barnard’s manuscript was a corrupted or stylized rendering of, for example, the acronym **A.M.A.E.**, denoting the Latin values: *Amor* – Love, *Mores* – Morals, *Amicitia* – Friendship, and *Eruditio* – Learning. Together, these values represent the Methodist collegiate ideal of the 1830s and 1840s. The

⁷⁹⁹ William E. Mockler. “[The Source of “Ku Klux”](#)”. *Names: Journal of the American Name Society*. III. 1955, pp.14-18; *Confederate Veteran*. Vol. 24, No. 5 (May 1916) Nashville TN., p. 204.

⁸⁰⁰ Boyd, Leroy Stafford. “[The Original Kappa Alpha](#).” Reprinted from Banta’s Greek Exchange, Vol. VII, No. 4 (September 1919). Hathi Trust. No Kindle download.

⁸⁰¹ [Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania](#). *The Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania: A Sesquicentennial History*, 1964. Online. No Kindle download.

⁸⁰² Wood, George Bacon. [Early History of the University of Pennsylvania from Its Origin to the Year 1827. 3rd edition](#). Online. No Kindle download.

⁸⁰³ “[Philomathean Society](#),” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed August 5, 2025.

⁸⁰⁴ Harry V. Barnard. “[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#).” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988).

A.M.A.E. circle may have operated as a literary and moral society, distinct from formal college-recognized literary societies, or a Wesleyan “band” modeled on Methodist community structures. Whatever the origin may be, it has not yet been determined if the society survived after the college move to Florence in 1855.⁸⁰⁵

Virtually nothing is known about “*The B*” apart from its reputation. Unlike the other three societies, which tended toward refinement, The B was known for its disruptive spirit and lack of decorum.⁸⁰⁶ It may have functioned more like a mischief society or opposition group to the moral tone of LaGrange’s other student organizations. No surviving rosters or documents clarify its founding or membership.

Over at the University of Alabama, *Delta Kappa Epsilon* was established in 1847, *Kuklos Adelphon* in 1846. According to [Boyd](#),⁸⁰⁷ the latter would be dissolved in 1855 due in part to a disclosure of chapter secrets by one of the members. *Phi Gamma Delta* and *Alpha Delta Phi* were also on campus. Student George Little, who attended 1851 - 1855 recalled that DKE may have been the strongest. “One year the D.K.E. bragged that they had all the officers in the literary society,” he said. “This aroused the antagonism of the other students and the next year they did not elect a single man.”⁸⁰⁸

The Students Go to Class.

To the dedicated diarist, Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, is owed most of what is known about the formal educational experience of students at La Grange College. The formal classical orientation of the curriculum echoed

⁸⁰⁵ Other societies derived their names from their initials, such as the Flat Hat Club of William and Mary, the first known secret college society. Founded in 1750, the initials of the society F. H. C., stand for a Latin phrase, one rendering being *Fraternitas, Humanitas et Cognitio* – publicly nicknamed the [Flat Hat Club](#).

⁸⁰⁶ Harry V. Barnard. “[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#).” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988).

⁸⁰⁷ Boyd, Leroy Stafford. “[The Original Kappa Alpha](#).” Reprinted from Banta’s Greek Exchange, Vol. VII, No. 4 (September 1919). Hathi Trust.

⁸⁰⁸ Little, George. [Memoirs of George Little](#). Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1924. Hathi Trust, p. 15; James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 181.

that in place in all the reputable college in the country. However, the tactical importance of the preparatory department on the frontier was more in play on the mountain than in the older, established, states. To the preparatory tutors fell the role of preparing many on campus for the rigorous college curriculum. However, some wealthy students, raised in more populous settings like Huntsville, Athen, and Florence came to La Grange prepared. Thomas Hubbard Hobbs was one of those.

Hobb's maternal grandfather, Major Thomas Maclin, was a Virginia aristocrat who moved to Limestone country in the early 19th century. Carrying on the family's traditions, he raced his thoroughbreds in Limestone against those of Nicholas Davis, Samuel Ragland, Nathaniel Terry and others. Thomas' mother, Rebecca, graduated from a Philadelphia finishing school and made the move to Limestone County with her father and several siblings (her own mother, Julia Edmonds Maclin, died in 1818). Thomas' father, Ira, was himself the son of Hubbard and Martha Meredith Hobbs, Hubbard died in 1817, and Martha moved to Alabama with the family in 1820. Ira and his brothers, John and David, settled on newly available Limestone lands near Major Maclin. When married, Rebecca and Ira purchased lots in Athens and built a large home near the Female Institute. Their splendid home served as a boarding house for Institute students and other visitors, such as ministers. Rebecca played an active role at the Institute. It is said to be largely through her efforts that the Methodist Church was persuaded to elevate the female academy to collegiate status. The Maclins donated the land upon which the college was built, and Founder's Hall was constructed largely under Ira's direction with resources donated by other local aristocrats such as the Malones and Colemans.⁸⁰⁹

The Methodist Church made efforts to exercise oversight of academic quality at La Grange, and in June 1830, sent a Visiting Committee of four to be present at the first examinations of the 79 students then

⁸⁰⁹ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Oxford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. ix – x.

attending and to report on the condition of their college.⁸¹⁰ The first degree, an M. A. would be awarded to an unnamed recipient two years later, in 1832. According to secondary reports the college awarded its first B. A. degree to John D. Malone of Limestone County in 1833⁸¹¹, the second degree the next year, 1834, was conferred upon [John Wesley Vinson](#), a local student from La Grange. According to other sources, a total of ten degrees were awarded that Thursday June 5, in the Commencement Ceremony on the lawn of the Main Building.⁸¹² Posey notes that between 1838 and 1854, for the 15 of 17 commencements for which he could find records, La Grange issued the A. B. degree to 144 candidates. He found them profligate to a fault with the award of M. A. degrees. A total of 49 “regular” M. A. degrees were conferred, and the “honorary” M. A. to another 15. Nineteen of those were awarded in the first years of the

⁸¹⁰ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 433. Kindle download. Hathi Trust. Available online Google Books. The visiting committee was composed of [Fountain E. Pitts](#), [William P. Kendrick](#), [Ebenezer Hearn](#), [Lewis Garrett](#), and [Dr. Gilbert Taylor](#). One of the first physicians in Giles county, Tennessee, he was also a Methodist minister. In 1822, he freed seven enslaved people in Limestone County, an act that had to be approved by the Alabama legislature.

⁸¹¹ Posey makes this assertion about J. D. Malone, and Harry Barnard repeats it. (Neither uses the first name, “John” that occasionally creeps into [histories of La Grange College](#). But neither provides the source for the information. Other historians and the UNA web sites have subsequently repeated it. The opportunity remains for someone to verify as fact. (*The Western Methodist*, June 24, 1833, may recount his graduation.) Posey, Walter B. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#),” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933). Hathi Trust. Barnard, Harry V. “[LaGrange College: A Historical Sketch](#).” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society.

⁸¹² Such is Posey’s assertion, that Vinson alone received the degree that year. Posey, Walter B. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#),” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 16 Hathi Trust. However, the June 27 edition of the *Western Advocate* provides supplementary information, noting that in addition to John W. Vinson, the following people were also awarded degrees: William Ford, Madison County, Alabama; S. Tarpley, Clinton, Mississippi; [John Sale](#), Lawrence County, Alabama; Thomas C. Saunders, Lawrence County, Alabama; F. T. Paint, Western District, Tennessee; [Edward Asbury O’Neal](#), Madison County, Alabama; William S. Saunders, Lawrence County, Alabama; William Hancock, Giles County, Tennessee. The Degree of A.M. was conferred on Thomas A. Watkins, M.D., a graduate of the University of Georgia, for a total of 10 degrees: [Genealogical Information from the Western Methodist, 1833-1834](#). Compiled by Jonathan Kennon Thompson Smith Copyright, Jonathan K. T. Smith, 2003, p. 82, citing *Western Methodist June 27, 1834*, p. 2. “[John Wesley Vinson](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed August 7, 2025, confirms his La Grange degree.

school, 1833 – 1835. The former were awarded to graduates of La Grange, the honorary degrees to people who had never attended the college. Additionally, the Doctorate of Divinity was conferred upon 8. Taking things one step further, Joshua Soule, Bishop of the Methodist Church, and Henry B. Bascom, President of Transylvania University were awarded LL. D. degrees. In one year, 1843, when but 4 A. B. degrees were conferred, 12 M. A. degrees were handed out, one of them “honorary.”⁸¹³ During the 1830s, Anson West reported that the College was able to sustain a healthy enrollment.⁸¹⁴

The students at La Grange followed a pattern to their school week that had been established over the decades at other colleges and universities. Students rose early for morning prayers, before proceeding to the first of the day’s recitations or lectures. Returning to their dormitory rooms, they might read or study before heading to the steward’s hall to breakfast. Following the next round of recitations, the noon meal in the steward’s hall was typically the largest of the day, with a bit of free time afterwards. The day would end as it began, with chapel prayers before supper. After dining, the students read and studied until light’s out, remaining in their rooms until sunrise.⁸¹⁵

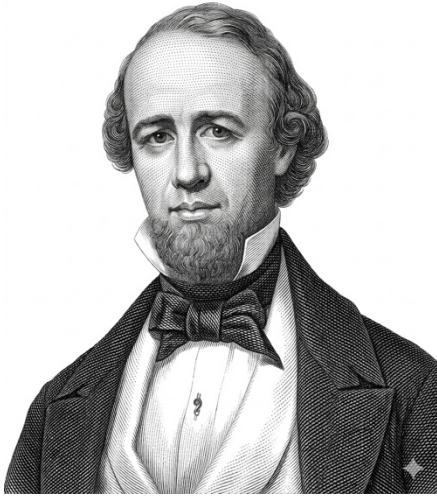
For La Grange students, the school day began with the morning bell. Washing face and hands in the room’s basin, a student might elect to skip the morning shave, dress hurriedly and move off to the chapel before the second morning bell and roll call. Avoiding a demerit for late arrival was

⁸¹³ Posey, Walter B. “[La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#),” *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 16 Hathi Trust. Importantly, Posey provides the sources for his numbers, which enables verification: *Christian Advocate* (New York), October 5, 1838; *South Western Christian Advocate* August 1, September 5, 1840, June 26, 1841, July 15, 1842, June 30, 1843, June 20, 1845, June 26, 1846; *Nashville Christian Advocate* June 18, 1847, June 23, 1848, July 6, 1849; *Nashville and Louisville Christian Advocate* July 3, 1851, June 17, 1852, June 23, 1853; *Nashville Christian Advocate*, July 27, 1854; Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, pp. 622-630.

⁸¹⁴ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 622.

⁸¹⁵ Dorn, Charles. [For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America](#). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017, p. 36.

high on everyone's list.⁸¹⁶ After chapel and the first of the day's class recitals, the students would repair to the mess hall for breakfast. During his



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senior year, Thomas Hobbs took his meals by arrangement with Henry [Tutwiler](#) and his family. That year, Hobbs had failed to reserve his lodging at the end of his junior year and arrived early to secure room number nine in Main with [Presley Keyes](#) and his other suitemates. Hobbs recorded a typical breakfast as three boiled eggs and two cups of fresh coffee. Then, it would be back to his room to prep for the rest of the day's lessons or, depending on the day, head directly to his next recitation. The mid-day

meal at the Tutwiler's home was "dinner" in the parlance of the time, and Hobbs notes in his journals a particular fondness for the cranberry tarts that [Julia](#) sometimes prepared. After the remaining recitations were evening prayers and perhaps a little free time. If Thomas lingered too long on the playing fields, he could find himself dining with the precocious children of the family. The third of 11 children, also named [Julia](#), would have been only three at the time, but even at that young age the conversations with the young woman could have been interesting.⁸¹⁷

The school day was not without tedium for Thomas Hobbs and his 116 classmates in 1844. In his diary, Thomas records his silent pleasure when the door to one of the recitation rooms was locked. He also wrote of struggling with drowsiness in class, once writing home for smelling salts [47, p. 66] Another time he recounts when another pupil fell into intense, snoring slumber in Carlos Smith's class—a sleep so deep that even the

⁸¹⁶ Watts, Charles. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 63.

⁸¹⁷ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 63-64.

professor was induced to find humor in the situation, dismissing the class with 30 lines remaining to be recited.

Smith's responsibilities that day raises the question of just how a small faculty of five or six, including the President and a tutor (if present) divided up the responsibilities of operating a college campus with 70 to hundred or more students, seven days a week. Very little has survived from the records of La Grange College – its relocation to Florence, the fiery destruction of the original site, and its assimilation later by the state, all taking a toll on archived records. However, the records of the University of Alabama, opening at almost the same time, and on the same scale, afford some inference and enable understanding. In his report to the University of Alabama Board in 1843, its president documented that he and his faculty would hear over the course of the year more than 2,000 recitations from the students, and that he would hear 159 of those. The professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy and Geology would hear another 191; The professor of Ancient Languages and Natural Philosophy, 228; the professor of Modern Languages, 277; the Professor of English Literature, 291; the tutor in Mathematics 355; and the tutor of Ancient Languages 352.⁸¹⁸ Even in 1843, the lowest ranking instructors, the tutors, carried the load of grading. A look at other shared duties will be examined later.

The small size of the student body assured an intimacy among students and faculty, and while the familiarity would sometimes create hostility and friction, it was fundamental to the learning process in early colleges. Hobbs struck up a particularly close relationship with Henry Tutwiler, a trust and familiarity that surfaces time and again in his journals. He notes that in preparing his Convocation remarks for his 1845 graduation, he left his draft at the Tutwiler home on May 4 for the professor to edit. Preparation apparently was meticulous, for a week later, Hobbs met with the other senior students to listen to all the speeches they

⁸¹⁸ Willis G. Clark. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, pp. 56-57.

were to deliver at convocation.⁸¹⁹ Oran Roberts recounts a similar relationship at the University of Alabama with mathematics professor William Hudson, who began his instruction at La Grange. The recitation protocol, where students exhibited their memorization of classroom assignments to the faculty member and fellow students did not necessarily imply a full comprehension of the subject matter, particularly in mathematics. Thus, it was that Hudson assigned to Roberts the most difficult problem to be solved before a public audience at the end of session. Their work through the course of the term had informed Hudson that Roberts would not have to rely upon memory to resolve the equation, drawing instead upon understanding and judgment.⁸²⁰

Despite the hard time visited upon La Grange following the Panic of 1837, the 1845 convocation was the college's largest to date. There were twelve in the graduating class, with 8 delivering remarks before the celebratory dinner and 4 afterwards. The valedictory remarks were offered by wealthy young Mississippian [Joseph Pierce Billups](#) (1827 – 1887). The Athens Brass Band, as was frequently the case, provided music for the 1845 festivities. Of special note to Hobbs were several charming young women over from his hometown of Athens to attend the ceremonies.⁸²¹ Hobbs recorded in his journal the feeling of transition when he received his diploma from the hands of Robert Paine, one of passing from a learning student into adulthood.⁸²²

⁸¹⁹ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 26-27.

⁸²⁰ Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836.* Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript. Special Collections, University of Alabama, p. 8.

⁸²¹ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, pp. 29 -30.

⁸²² Watts, Charles. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), pp. 75-76.

Until 1848, in the aftermath of Robert Paine's departure from La Grange, students were evaluated by a system of oral examinations spanning four to six days prior to graduation or advancement. Visiting committees were invited to observe and add external rigor. Any faculty member or visitor could question a student. In each discipline, the lead was taken by the professor of that subject. In 1841, for example, Richard Henderson Rivers directed the examination of Ancient Languages; Robert Paine queried the students in Political Economy and Rhetoric, and Henry Tutwiler questioned them on Optics, Astronomy, and Chemistry.⁸²³ In each instance, successful completion of examinations was followed by the graduation exercises.⁸²⁴

The system was replaced in 1848 by new President Wadsworth. Under the new protocol a president or a faculty member would read from material in the student's course, and the student was expected to respond with an analysis of the material presented. Finally, toward the end, in 1853, oral examinations were abolished altogether, and students were evaluated by written examinations administered by the faculty. The scale of marks on the exams was a five point scale, with the La Grange average between 4.0 and 4.25 (or from 80 to 82). The "written only" approach was probably more expedient for an overly stressed small faculty at the end of term.⁸²⁵ Other schools, such as the University of Virginia, retained the dual assessment approach of oral and written examinations through the antebellum years.⁸²⁶

⁸²³ Walter B. Posey. [La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#). *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 14.

⁸²⁴ Watts, Charles W. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-45." *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 75.

⁸²⁵ Walter B. Posey. [La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#). *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 14; Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, p. 14.

⁸²⁶ Moore, John H. "[The Old Dominion Through Student Eyes, 1852-1855: The Reminiscences of Thomas Hill Malone](#)." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 1963), p. 305.. (Malone was a student at LaGrange for 3 years before enrolling at UVa). UT Libraries. JSTOR. Kindle download

At home in almost every academic discipline, Henry Tutwiler opened the eyes of eager students to the possibilities of learning in every field. He eagerly embraced the emerging sciences of the era. While a student at the University of Virginia, he was able to avail himself of directed inquiry into astronomy, where in 1823, Jefferson had converted an unoccupied dwelling on Monroe Hill into a rudimentary observatory – perhaps the first such in the United States.⁸²⁷ Thomas McCorvey quotes one of the first students at the University of Alabama, citing Tutwiler’s reach and competence: “He was as much at home in the chemical laboratory as he was in his own room with the classics. He was familiar with all the sciences and was always at work. He was handy with the telescope, and he knew the heavens.”⁸²⁸ And while the resources of La Grange College could not match the astronomical equipment of the University of Alabama, the former apparently had itself a rudimentary observatory.⁸²⁹ It was likely there, one clear day in 1845, when Tutwiler, using a telescope and colored glass, excitedly demonstrated to eager students the transit of Mercury across the face of the sun. Hobbs in his diary describes the phenomenon as “about the size of an ordinary buckshot.”⁸³⁰ Interestingly, Mercury transits only about 13 times per century, and Tutwiler had the acumen and the opportunity to capture the passage that May 8th.⁸³¹

⁸²⁷ [Early Astronomy at UVA](#). University of Virginia. College of Arts and Sciences. Department of Astronomy. Online. Accessed September 25, 2025.

⁸²⁸ McCorvey, Thomas Chalmers. [Transcribed Biography of Henry Tutwiler](#). Typewritten. Circa, 1920, pp. 1-2.

⁸²⁹ Palmer, Michael E. “[La Grange College is Alabama’s Birthplace of Higher Education](#).” *Tuscaloosa News*. Online version. April 24, 2009.

⁸³⁰ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 27.

⁸³¹ VII. Observations of the Solar Eclipse of 1845, May 5, and of the Transit of Mercury of 1845, May 8, in a Letter from W. Lassell, Esq
Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, Volume 6, Issue 17, June 1845, Pages 255–256, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mnras/6.17.255>

"It would seem," observed the student of the professor, "that he had no use for learning except for its quiet enjoyment and for the delight it gave him to impart it to others."⁸³² Shortly before graduation, Hobbs worked with Tutwiler on some optics issues and learned about cataracts on the human eye and new surgical processes to remove the occluded lens. "This is indeed a bold stroke of surgery, and yet it is frequently performed."⁸³³

On another occasion, Hobbs describes a scientific experiment under the direction of Tutwiler, in which a simple battery zinc and copper was employed to activate the muscles in the legs of a grasshopper. He related that they performed other experiments with the modest tool. With him was another co-experimenter, probably William Pierce of Florence.⁸³⁴

Among the instruments available to the professor were an hydraulic press, and an "electro-typing apparatus" Apparently, the latter referred to [*electrotyping*](#), a complex process which uses electricity to make a metal copy of an object. The chemicals used have changed slightly since the 19th century, but the process itself has remained very similar. Says Hobbs, "if properly managed, the model will soon become coated to any thickness whatever and the coat may be removed by heating the model and will be an exact copy of it even to the finest mark."⁸³⁵ Apparently, his non-stop pace and inquisitiveness could lead to haste and perhaps even a little carelessness on the professor's part. In his journal, Thomas remarked that on one occasion, Tutwiler "shocked me powerfully" with some sort of magneto-electrical apparatus. Perhaps an even more dangerous

⁸³² McCorvey. Thomas Chalmers. [*Transcribed Biography of Henry Tutwiler*](#). Typewritten. Circa, 1920, p. 2.

⁸³³ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 29.

⁸³⁴ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 14.

⁸³⁵ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 16, p. 23.

undertaking Tutwiler asked of his students was the operation of a compound blowpipe fueled by oxygen and hydrogen jets. With the students operating the stopcocks, they eventually got the jet of flame going and quickly melted an old steel file.⁸³⁶

And sometimes, it seems, Professor Tutwiler could become just “one of the boys.” On the birthday of Lafayette, September 6, 1844, Hobbs and other students tried to launch hot air balloons, but having no experience, failed, both efforts catching ablaze as they rose. In the cool of October, he and Tutwiler tried again, but failed as Hobb’s tissue frame for the balloon was deemed too porous. Finally, on another evening in the Spring of 1845, Hobbs and Tutwiler successfully launched one of their hydrogen balloons to a height of about 35 feet, but the weight of the string prevented its further ascent.⁸³⁷

And sometimes, the disciplined inquiry of the laboratory could devolve plainly into hijinks. During this period, there was a scientific interest in the application and usefulness of nitrous oxide as a sedative and mild anesthetic to reduce anxieties during medical procedures. Unadulterated, the nitrous oxide, it was quickly learned, could be dangerous, displacing oxygen in the body and leading to asphyxiation. But carefully controlled, with a minimum of 30 percent oxygen, it could achieve both sedative and recreational effects. In the latter instance, the gas stimulates the brain’s reward system, releasing dopamine and causing feelings of euphoria and giddiness, earning it the early sobriquet of “laughing gas.”⁸³⁸ And so it was, one evening after prayers, that Hobbs made his way to the laboratory to observe Tutwiler administering nitrous oxide to student volunteers. The effects led to both pugnacity and hilarity. [Turner Saunders](#), whose grandfather of the same name was chairman of

⁸³⁶ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 22, p. 27.

⁸³⁷ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p.16. p. 18, p. 26.

⁸³⁸ [“Recreational Uses of Nitrous Oxide”](#). *Wikipedia*. Accessed September 25, 2025.

the board of trustees, aggressively chased other students around. Another, James Lowe, after boasting of his loquacity and proposing to offer a speech on Texas, degenerated into fisticuffs with his audience. After inhaling, Thomas' friend, [Matt Clay](#) (1827 – 1901), chased a lay observer, a tailor, back to his shop in the village. Experimentation with the gas was apparently quite popular for Hobbs recounts another episode with equally bizarre deportment on the part of those who chose to inhale. On this occasion Tutwiler brought the gas to the students in a bladder from the laboratory. Among the willing participants were Lowe (again), Wynne Mason and Ben DeGraffenried. The spectacle of laughing gas stuck with Hobbs, for he writes in his diary that while in Philadelphia, he went one night to the University and paid 12 ½ cents to watch students inhale the nitrous oxide. On another occasion, he himself inhaled the gas and he reported in his diary its intoxicating effects.⁸³⁹

Student Hijinks.

From the beginning an inescapable aspect of student life on American college campus has been the almost inexhaustible capacity for mischief. Manners, one writer noted, were all too often rude, boisterous, and self-assertive, the behavior of a frontier people unaccustomed to compliance to external rules and discipline by rule-makers. On college campuses, it was commonplace to remove the stairs from building entrances, forcing faculty to climb into classrooms via windows, or resort to ladders. Doors could be barred, and windows smashed. At Yale, Christmas was the occasion to paint the president's home red, white and blue, and to

⁸³⁹ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p.16. p. 18, p. 33.

induce a cow up the stairs to the top floor of a dormitory, abandoning it there.⁸⁴⁰ Outhouses were always being set ablaze.⁸⁴¹

La Grange College was no stranger to horseplay. And sometimes President Paine, the stern Methodist minister, would allow himself to participate. Once, hearing that a group of mischievous students were planning to pull his carriage from the carriage house and take it down the slope to the foot of La Grange Mountain, Paine quietly slipped inside the coach, locked the doors and closed the curtains. When the theft occurred and the boys had pushed the carriage down the mountain, stopping at intervals to restore their breathing, Reverend Paine pulled back the curtains, thanked the students for the ride, and directed them back to the carriage house. The incident was not reported to the faculty.⁸⁴² April Fool's Day was greeted with hijinks according to Hobbs. Students were absent from school in large numbers; chapel doors were barricaded, and its windows were locked. Hobbs did complain in his diary that his classes all met, while others did not.⁸⁴³

The remote mountain fastness was no protection from the hijinks of students left to their own nefarious devices. After a full Sunday dinner, student Jesse Coe lay down to nap in his dormitory room and soon fell into deep slumber. His roommates and other students could not forego the opportunity for devilment. Two of the conspirators went upstairs to the garret above his room with the plan to pester him from above, while others were assembling little "cotton fleas" to ignite and wake him with a

⁸⁴⁰ Sheldon, Henry D. [*Student Life and Customs*](#). New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1901, p. 107. Online. Kindle download. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose: in 1965, University of Virginia students placed a two hundred and fifty pound heifer [atop the Rotunda](#). The animal expired during removal due to stress, dehydration and an overdose of sedative. One of the culprits, then president of NASDAQ, confessed thirty years later to being one of the culprits.

⁸⁴¹ Sack, Saul. "[Student Life in the Nineteenth Century](#)". *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol 85, No. 3. July 1961, pp. 255-288. Kindle download.

⁸⁴² Walter B. Posey. [La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#). *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 11.

⁸⁴³ [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 24.

start. Unexpectedly, one of the conspirators broke through the plastered ceiling above the bedstead, waking young Coe with a start. Seeing so many students fleeing the room in apparent panic, and plaster falling from the ceiling, Jesse's sleep-befuddled brain leapt to the conclusion that La Grange was experiencing an earthquake and bolted from his bed and down the corridor stairway, leapfrogging his companions and not stopping until he had reached the safety of the lower floor.⁸⁴⁴

A prank with considerably greater consequence occurred in the Franklin dormitory in Tuscaloosa. There, one evening, Franklin Bowden had his studies interrupted when two students, Webb and McAlpine, crashed through his door in a furious altercation. During the prolonged struggle a sword was drawn, and Webb fell to the floor with an apparent stab wound, blood all over his shirt. McAlpine fled from the room as other students rushed into his to assist the injured Webb, who weakly choked to the listeners, "Bowden killed me," and lapsed into unconsciousness. Students rushed from the room to find sheriff, said aloud by one to be Webb's cousin. William Inge and Zeb Davis fended off Bowden's insistence that he remain to defend himself, and spirited him off campus, through a surrounding fence and into the woodlands. Voices behind them could be heard shouting, and gunshots were fired. Davis and Inge returned fire, Inge falling, saying he was hit, and urging Bowden to save himself. Hiding in the woodlands overnight, evading pranksters who having savored their joke, were now concerned for Bowden's well-being. Ten days later, recounts his friend Oran Roberts, Bowden returned to campus with his father, an old farmer. He had fled to his home. Back in the dormitory after a session with Alva Woods, Bowden showed Roberts two pistols, a very large one and a vest pocket derringer. A month or so later, Bowden took measure of one of

⁸⁴⁴ [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America.*](#) Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 13.

the pranksters after the evening meal, and the incident faded without further violence.⁸⁴⁵

[Oran Milo Roberts](#), a strapping raw youth from the mountains of St. Claire County, recounts in his *Reminiscences* a similar incident at the University of Alabama. Roberts, who would later become Governor of Texas and Dean of the Law School at the University of Texas, developed a first reputation among the students for his athleticism and strength. But his senior tormentors were unprepared for the reception they received when they elected one evening to “welcome” him to campus:



Figure 66. Oran Milo Roberts

I was engaged to a late hour in the night in hard study over my lessons, being alone in my sleeping-room, when becoming tired I blew out the light and went to bed. Before going to sleep the door to my room was opened, and by the dim light furnished by the windows and door I discovered two tall objects, covered with white sheets, passing into the room, mumbling out some sort of utterances, calling on me. As quick as thought, for I really never knew what I thought, I bounded out of bed, rushed at the front figure, caught hold of him, and, with all my might, wrenched him around me, and threw him on the floor, and at once made a grab at the other figure as he retreated, and got from him the bosom of his ruffle shirt, and by that time a voice called out: 'Roberts, Oh, Roberts, Are you going to kill a body, you have thrown me down with my head against the corner of your trunk: They were Alexander B. Meek and John Tindall. I said not a word but sullenly got back into bed, as may be supposed very mad.'⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁵ Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836*. Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript. Special Collections, University of Alabama, p. 10 – 12; Windham, Kevin Lee. [Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods, and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831-1837](#). Ph. D dissertation. University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa 2010, pp. 117 – 120.

⁸⁴⁶ Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836*. Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript. Special Collections, University of Alabama.

Fortunately, [Alexander Beaufort Meek](#) survived his embarrassment, graduated and became a stellar figure of his own in Alabama history.

While imposing a remote and relatively bucolic existence for the student body, rural La Grange College, via the Byler Turnpike, was on the beaten path of the small-time entrepreneurs of the day. In the brief span of Thomas Hobb's senior diary, the campus was entertained by such troupes as the "wild man of Borneo" traveling "freak show" (the wild man presumed by the students to be a small but deformed child); a circus, a juggler, a blind boy with an array of tricks performed in solicitation of support for a school for the blind in Nashville, Wilbur and his trained dog, and a painting exhibition purportedly painted by Benjamin West (1738-1820) one of the first American artists to earn a broad patronage in Europe. The circus arrived at La Grange only a day or two after the visit of the wild man of Borneo, showcasing elephants, lions, hyenas, and llamas. When he was 14, Hobbs wrote the circus had come to Athens, and featured perhaps the first giraffe to be exhibited alive in the U. S. However, Hobb's stern parents did not allow him to attend.⁸⁴⁷ There appears to be something the Southern evangelical community disapproved about circuses, and as will be seen, a circus was the cause of a major crisis at the University of Alabama.

Indeed, it was not just the attitude toward circuses that was colored by the growing awakening of the people's religiosity. Solomon Smith and his brother Lean were barnstorming troupers who scrapped out a living with theater performances across the south. In a time of such religious fervor, they experienced hard times. In Columbia, Tennessee, Smith reports their efforts one week in the 1830s were happily remunerative, earning as much as \$600 a night. In contrast, in Huntsville, over four weeks in 1830, they considered themselves fortunate when an evening netted \$60. The

⁸⁴⁷ Watts, Charles. "Student Days at Old La Grange College, 1844-1845," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 24 (January 1971), p. 72; [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 18; p. 4.

next, performances in Florence and Tuscumbia were equally disappointing. Seven nights on the stage of the city's major hotel returned but \$251; six nights in Tuscumbia yielded but \$150. In the valley, he observed they had to compete against preaching almost every evening. "The preachers endeavored to make their hearer believe," bemoaned Solomon, "that all who visited the theatre would certainly be eternally roasted in the hottest sort of fires, the heat of which were to be intensified by liberal supplies of brimstone!"⁸⁴⁸

And so it was with other aspects of worldly pleasures as the great awakening impressed itself upon the frontier. Gambling, card-playing, liquor— ever present on the steamboats and in the bars and taverns along the riverfronts and in the road stands— were increasingly off-limits to the evangelical faithful. Even dancing and horse-racing were enjoined. On the few pages of his memoir, Robert Paine found time to register his opposition to all of those, including a lengthy recollection of his encounter with the first deck of cards he saw while fetching his ailing uncle home from the Creek wars.⁸⁴⁹ Likewise, the racetrack and fast horses, the passion of Andrew Jackson and countless other elites drew the opprobrium of the evangelicals. As Paine observed: "I do not say that running, or simple racing, is a sin, or that looking at a race is of itself such, especially if it be accidental; but I do unequivocally say that the race-course is the theater where one of the worst kinds of gambling is practiced, and that all abettors of it are practically contributing to debauch public sentiment."⁸⁵⁰ For the evangelical lifestyle, concluded Paine, many of the diversions of the populace were enjoined: "I think I can safely say that horse-racing, the liquor traffic, theater-going, and dancing— all of which belong to the same category — when properly dealt with, will dissolve Church-membership

⁸⁴⁸ Smith, Solomon Franklin. [*Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years. Interspersed with Anecdotal Sketches*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868, pp. 59-60, 74.

⁸⁴⁹ Paine, Robert. *Notes of Life*. Typescript. Available on Microfilm as part of the Nashville *Christian Advocate* collection, Vanderbilt University School of Theology, p. 12.

⁸⁵⁰ , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 197.

when properly brought into the Church-court.”⁸⁵¹ Indeed, for the temerity of introducing gymnastic dancing as a part of the curriculum at the Nashville Female Academy, headmaster Collins D. Elliott would find himself dismissed from membership in his own Nashville Methodist Church.⁸⁵²

Steadily, as the raw frontier evolved into a semblance of small town and agrarian stability in the Tennessee Valley, the sterner values of itinerant ministers and evangelical churches made themselves felt among the populace. Lorenzo Dow, a self-branded Methodist who received a circuit license to preach from Francis Asbury himself, was among the first of the evangelists to energize the southern frontier. As early as 1803, he was preaching to the settlements along the Tensaw and Tombigbee, returning in annual or biennial cycles a dozen times over the next decade.⁸⁵³

Charismatic personalities were the feature of frontier camp meetings to which people would travel thirty or forty miles, staying nights in makeshift tents and lean-to arbors. As things became more organized, the camp meetings were often in connection with established Methodist or Baptist Conferences. As many as two or three thousand men, women and children could join in these settings for singing, exhortations, and sermons without letup, with conversion to the faith being the primary goal of the ministers.⁸⁵⁴ Robert Paine experienced his first tugs toward a future of itinerant preaching at a camp meeting in Giles County, Tennessee in October, 1817, featuring the two prominent Methodist ministers, [Thomas Logan Douglass](#) and Miles Harper. Paine would formally convert that very

⁸⁵¹ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 201.

⁸⁵² Hale, Will Thomas, Dixon Lanier Merritt. [A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans](#): The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities. Vol. . IV. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., p. 2087. Google Books. Kindle Book download.

⁸⁵³ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, pp. 28-34.

⁸⁵⁴ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 40.

month.⁸⁵⁵ Oran Roberts describes the rather ornate camp-meeting site that existed about three miles from the University, which he visited with two of his friends. The meals, the social aspects, the orations, and the commitment of the attendees come through compellingly.⁸⁵⁶

Student Violence.

Unfortunately, violence and lawlessness that plagued the frontier were also features of early university life, a reality that plagued trustees, faculty and students, as well as townspeople. Initially, there was some local confidence that the entitled elite of Alabama would comport themselves differently than elsewhere, where sometimes campuses and students earned nefarious reputations for their behavior. The editors of the *Huntsville Advocate* writing before the University of Alabama admitted its first students, expressed their confidence that the Tuscaloosa campus would not fall prey to the “laxative discipline which abounds in the southern seminaries.”⁸⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the proclivities of an entitled elite student body and the inclinations of an unyielding Alva Woods, who as one historian noted, “learned discipline in the shadow of the New England Puritans,” were harbingers of conflict.⁸⁵⁸ In his *History of Education in Alabama*, Willis Clark sums up the reasons for the “lawlessness and insubordination” which characterized the seven years of Dr. Woods' presidency by putting the blame, not upon any “neglect of duty” on the part of the faculty, nor “want of executive ability” on the part of the president, but squarely on the shoulders of the students of that day. The

⁸⁵⁵ , Richard Henderson. [*The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p.26. Harper’s fervent and effective oratory is described by on p. 29.

⁸⁵⁶ Roberts, O. M. *Reminiscences O. M. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836*. Presented to the Eurosoptic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript. Special Collections, University of Alabama, p. 21.

⁸⁵⁷ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., pp. 55-56.

⁸⁵⁸ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., pp. 55-56.

students were largely influenced in their conduct and manners by their environment. The civilization of the State was, at the time, the civilization of a frontier people. The State had not yet been redeemed from the wilderness. A large part of the eastern and north-eastern region was still in possession of the Creek and Cherokee tribes of Indians. A large part of the frontier inhabitants had not yet learned to submit patiently to the wholesome restraints of the law. It is not so strange, he posited, that the sons of the pioneers were restless under the firm restrictions of college government that expected them to conduct themselves under the rules then in place at Transylvania (Alva Woods' previous college) and Harvard.⁸⁵⁹ His was an iron rule, that held both parent and student accountable for transgressions:

Why is the parent so often called to weep over his son's waywardness and disregard of parental counsels? Because that son was never taught that obedience to parents is the first duty of childhood. Why are instructors of youth sometimes vexed with turbulent, unmanageable pupils, who show no regard for law or order! -Generally, it is because those youth were never taught in the nursery the first lessons of submission to lawful authority. Perhaps they were sent abroad because they were found unmanageable at home. The period during which they might have been made docile and tractable, is passed away.⁸⁶⁰

In stark contrast, "Old Bob" Paine, secreted in the back of his carriage as his students furtively took it from its stable and pushed it down Byler Road from the mountain, was the picture of congeniality and forbearance.

At the University, the lack of preparation of the students, and their lack of dedication to their studies precipitated an early crisis there. Professors Henry Tutwiler and Gurdon Saltonstall were the two faculty on hand in 1831 to greet students upon their arrival. President Alva Woods arrived much later. And Tutwiler was the student favorite among all the

⁸⁵⁹ Willis G. Clark. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 43. Accessible Google Books.

⁸⁶⁰ Sellers, James Benson. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 57-58.

faculty, a reflection of his dedication, competence, and accessibility. Saltonstall was seen as a courteous and gentlemanly figure. However, it was his role to instruct the student body in the field of mathematics, a process that did not go smoothly. In the Spring of 1832, nine of the trustees wrote Saltonstall, finding fault with his instruction and the lack of student success, which was driving many from the university. The professor made no reply until the December meeting of the trustees, when he defended his teaching, asking to be evaluated on his capabilities, and declaring that the shortcoming lay in the lack of prior preparation of the students for the discipline. The assessment requested by Saltonstall never took place. His end came quickly, the trustees replacing him by the end of December 1832, and William Hudson, Yale graduate and known to Alva Woods, coming over from La Grange College to replace him in January 1833. Hudson's salary of \$1,500 was probably greater than La Grange could pay him, but it was \$500 less than Saltonstall's former remuneration.⁸⁶¹

By 1834, the restiveness at the University of Alabama was in full riot. On a warm March evening, the students exploded, rallying in the quad to the sound of horns and clothing themselves in white, wrote young Clement Clay to his father. In the melee that ensued, both William Hudson and Henry Tutwiler attempted and failed to quieten the rioters, who subsequently attacked President Woods when they saw him approaching the dormitory, hurling bricks and firing their personal weapons. Woods evaded them, fading into the evening darkness, but the students burst into the chapel, rang the bells, hurled stones at the windows of Hudson and Woods, and threatened Wallace. Only Tutwiler seemed to escape their ire. A couple of months later, the President was assaulted by students lashing him with whips. Some students were expelled, and by trustee edict were never to be allowed to return to campus.⁸⁶² Alva Woods blamed his faculty

⁸⁶¹ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., pp. 53, 59, 93.

⁸⁶² Letter from Clement C. Clay, Jr to his father. February 28, cited in Sellers, James Benson. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902 (University of Alabama Press, p. 59. Kindle Edition.

for the unrest among the students, particularly Henry Tutwiler, the relatively new William Hudson, and John Fielding Wallis, professor of Natural History, and like Tutwiler one of the original faculty. Of the three, Wallis was selected as the most likely culprit by the trustees, and his resignation was brought about in August. [Richard T. Brumby](#) was appointed as his replacement.⁸⁶³ But the troubles were just beginning. Soon the circus would come to town.

Violence was also brewing on mountain. On the evening of November 5, 1834, a La Grange student was shot and killed, purportedly by a rowdy or vagabond. The student, Sidney M. Smith from Vicksburg, lived only a few hours and was buried on Lawrence's Hill.⁸⁶⁴ Not long afterwards, Posey noted, the student body attempted to avert future such atrocity by formulating the "Moral Association of La Grange". The Association's preamble declared in part: "Feeling an interest in La Grange College and believing that the success of this and similar institutions depends in a great degree upon the moral character and general deportment of the students we hereby form ourselves into an Association for the promotion of the moral deportment among the students." One of the articles declared that any offense against College rules would be subject to action by the laws of the Association. The next article declared that wanton and unruly acts could result in students being expelled from the association itself.⁸⁶⁵ It is not clear the association achieved the effect of moral suasion that it sought.⁸⁶⁶

The appearance of a traveling circus in Tuscaloosa in April 1836 proved the undoing of Alva Woods' administration and led directly to the

⁸⁶³ James Benson Sellers. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 62.

⁸⁶⁴ Walter B. Posey. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)". *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 12; Harry V. Barnard. "[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988), p. 41.

⁸⁶⁵ Walter B. Posey. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)". *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 12. (The quotation here by Posey is taken from *The Western Methodist*, May 2, 1834).

⁸⁶⁶ Walter B. Posey. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)". *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 13.

dismissal of the entire faculty. Despite a prohibition against circus attendance, most students visited the spectacle during the days of performance, sometimes in groups and sometimes singly. Some like Bowden and Roberts behaved demurely and kept to themselves; others cavorted in raucous schoolboy groups. On April 20, a few days after the circus departed Tuscaloosa, six students were dismissed from the University for their circus attendance, forbidden to return before February 1837. An uproar followed. A petition was circulated among the students to revoke the suspension, as, it was argued, the same penalty should be applied to the 90 or so students who in fact attended. However, only 40 students signed the petition, and a split emerged between the two factions as well as between the entire student body and the administration. The situation festered and worsened. Woods and the faculty responded with the imposition of even more draconian rules and the suspension of all the signatories of the petition. A bold individual appeal to Woods by student Oran Roberts led to the postponement of the new rules until the start of the new term in February 1837, an act that led to reconciliation among the two student factions. They remained, however, opposed to Woods and the faculty both for the suspensions and the draconian rules they would face upon return. Alva Woods moral authority over his students, noted one scholar, was bankrupt.⁸⁶⁷

As 1837 unfolded, violence was a feature of both the La Grange and Tuscaloosa campuses. In the Spring, two La Grange students, heretofore friends, fell into an altercation, one fatally stabbing the other.⁸⁶⁸ Chroniclers gave high marks to President Paine for his compassionate intervention after the fact, soothing the aggrieved family and friends of the

⁸⁶⁷ Roberts, O. W. *Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836*. Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892. Typewritten manuscript. Special Collections, University of Alabama, pp. 18 -20; ; Windham, Kevin Lee. [*Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods, and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831-1837*](#). Ph. D dissertation. University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa 2010, pp. 127 – 130; James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 63 – 64.

⁸⁶⁸ “Unfortunate and Distressing Occurrence.” *The North Alabamian*. Tuscumbia. April 24, 1837, p. 2

murdered student and earning the gratitude of those close to the perpetrator for his magnanimity.⁸⁶⁹ One historian suggests that reaffirmation of the La Grange Student Moral Code followed this act of violence and cites another article in the *North Alabamian* ("Circular Letter of the Faculty of La Grange College", May 5, 1837) claiming that the students ...of their own accord, and unanimously, have pledged themselves to the Faculty, that they will give up such arms as they may have, and no more, whilst at College, carry, or in any way deep, deadly weapons of any kind."⁸⁷⁰

It is important to remember that in 1837, Alabama was still very much a frontier state. The extirpation of the indigenous tribes had not yet been completed. While some 15,000 were at that point enroute to their new lands in Oklahoma, a significant number of men, women and children broke from their concentration camps where they were being assembled and fled into the swamps along the Pea River in South Alabama. That last, desperate armed resistance took place at Hodby's Bridge, where militia overwhelmed the Creeks. Two militia and at least 23 warriors lost their lives in the last such battle in Alabama, March 24, 1837.⁸⁷¹

In the Fall of 1837, things took another turn for the worse on the campuses. At that time, when the University of Alabama descended into chaos, W. T. Young wrote to Francis A. Wood, a student at La Grange, that "six or eight young scamps who had succeeded in the final overthrow of the University at Tuscaloosa being emboldened by their former success have tried to bring about a revolution in this institution. They have committed some depredations of the most direful hue such as arming themselves and assailing the professors at the dead of midnight and burning down the

⁸⁶⁹ Richard Henderson . [*The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.*](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 53.

⁸⁷⁰ Cramer, Clayton E. *Concealed Weapon Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform.* Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999, p. 120.

⁸⁷¹ ["The Battle of Hodby's Bridge."](#) Explore Southern History.com. Online Accessed October 9, 2025

chapel”.⁸⁷² By whatever manner, that unrest spread to La Grange. While Paine was away conducting the affairs of the University, a half dozen or so students had been suspended for their actions at one of the local inns apparently in consort with the innkeeper. When he returned, he found the suspended culprits threatening to shoot the faculty and burn the college.⁸⁷³ Confronting the rowdies, Paine found that there were students boisterous in their support, while another contingent stood ready to support the faculty. One of the rebels pointed his pistol at the President and threatened to fire. According to one contemporary, Paine, still the moral authority on the mountain, looked sternly at the miscreant and ordered him to drop the weapon. “The pistol dropped, and the defiant hand hung limp and powerless by the side of the intimidated and trembling youth.”⁸⁷⁴ The campus disorder was ended, and students were forbidden to have further interaction with the inn, or its innkeeper, McCaleb, who purportedly threatened the President’s life and killed another man before disappearing from the area.⁸⁷⁵

In 1837, the situation in Tuscaloosa unraveled entirely. The new rules that were imposed for the start of the school term provoke seeking resentment, boycotts, rioting, and gunplay on campus. Students were suspended *en masse* for skipping classes. Many students went home after suspension; others continued their combative tactics on campus. Of the 101 students enrolled that year, only 1, Joseph Dunham Jenkins, stood for a degree.

In January 1837, Henry Tutwiler wrote his colleague at the University of Virginia, Gessner Harrison, of his intent to resign, citing his disapproval of Woods, the Alabama trustees, and the heavy hand of the other faculty. The

⁸⁷² “[Wood Family Papers 1833 - 1864](#)” Tennessee State Library and Archives. Kindle edition. P. 3

⁸⁷³ Harry V. Barnard. “[La Grange College: A Historical Sketch.](#)” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988), p. 11

⁸⁷⁴ Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 52.

⁸⁷⁵ Richard Henderson . [The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 52.

descent into chaos is aptly reflected in a *Times Picayune* article reporting incidents on campus in late Spring:

*Some of the Professors of the Alabama University at Tuscaloosa, lately fired several pistols at some refractory students. The students returned the fire, and the Alma Mater of our sister State was suddenly converted into a scene of commotion and smoke. We have heard of above a dozen rows at this college, and should suppose, from their frequency, that 'Plato's philosophic care' is not much regarded at this seat of learning.*⁸⁷⁶

In August the faculty submitted their resignations as a group, with Francois Bonfils and Richard Brumby agreeing to remain until their replacements arrived. They, tutor John Gay, preparatory program head Smith, and Manly held the university and its thin number of students together until the new President arrived. On August 12, Tutwiler wrote to again to Harrison of his intention to depart by October 1, and shared his despondent assessment of the University:

*You will have probably heard before you receive this that my connection with the Institution is dissolved or rather will be on the 1st of October. Since the proceedings of the last meeting of the Board of Trustees, I have scarcely an hope that the University will ever do any good, and if I could make you understood the situation of affairs here, you would, I know, congratulate me on my escape.*⁸⁷⁷

Leaving Tuscaloosa disillusioned, Tutwiler would shortly take a position at the ephemeral [Marion Manual Labor Institute of South Alabama](#), remaining there until 1840 when he assumed the professorship of chemistry and mathematics at La Grange.⁸⁷⁸ President Alva Woods would

⁸⁷⁶ Windham, Kevin. [Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1837](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010, p. 136; Broadus, John A. [A Memorial of Gessner Harrison, M. D. Read before the Society of Alumni, July 2, 1873](#). Charlottesville: Chronicle Steam Publishing House, 1874. Google Books.

⁸⁷⁷ Windham, Kevin. [Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1837](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010, p. 148.

⁸⁷⁸ McCorvey, Thomas Chalmers. [“Henry Tutwiler, and the Influence of the University of Virginia on Education in Alabama.”](#) *Alabama Historical Society. Reprint No. 32*, pp. 83-106.; from *The Transactions*, Vol. V (1904). Montgomery, AHS, 1905, p. 99.

never again hold a post of similar stature as the University of Alabama, and would die in Providence, Rhode Island in 1887.⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁹ James Benson Sellers. [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 65; Windham, Kevin. [*Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831 – 1837*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2010, p. 149. For background see [*Manual Labor Institute of South Alabama*](#); its name was changed to Madison College before meeting its demise in 1842.

Chapter 8

La Grange College: from Maturity to Demise, 1837-1854

Educational Currents in Alabama

In 1837, the faculty to whom Paine entrusted the instruction of the students were Elliott, Rivers, Masson and Barbour. Richard Henderson Rivers, a La Grange graduate was elected professor of Latin and Greek, and Collins D. Elliott picked up the mathematics portfolio vacated by Ellison's departure for Macon, Georgia. Rivers would be the first in a growing trend of hiring local graduates for open faculty positions, a fact that would characterize the college in future years.

Henry Masson had been the professor of modern languages since 1835, and Thomas Barbour had filled Harrington's chemistry role the same year. The preparatory department was in the hands of either Richard Shepherd or R. J. Muncham, about whom little is known.⁸⁸⁰ Fiscally, these were difficult times for the college and Robert Paine. Four agents were designated by the Tennessee Methodist Conference in 1837 to seek support for La Grange among the church congregations. One of them, Littleton Fowler departed that year for a missionary appointment in Texas.⁸⁸¹ The Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Church also intermittently assigned agents, as did the Memphis Conference after its establishment in 1840. The Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church was established in 1832, and in time it too assigned agents to the role of sustaining La Grange. As noted earlier, the proliferation of regional conferences, and the rise of the interest of each for establishing their own

⁸⁸⁰ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 622; Walter B. Posey. [La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#). Birmingham Southern College Bulletin, XXVI (November 1933), p. 7.

⁸⁸¹ Thrall, Homer S. [History of Methodism in Texas](#). Houston: E. H. Cushing, 1872, p. 21.

colleges, such as Emory (1837) would dilute the scarce resources available to Methodist higher education and add to the woes of La Grange.⁸⁸²

Wesleyan and Randolph-Macon. While it was sponsoring La Grange College in the deep south, the Methodist Church was also opening in the same year, Wesleyan College in Massachusetts and Randolph-Macon College in Virginia. Geographical and population factors favored those two over the remote college in the Tennessee Valley and added to the challenges of Robert Paine. [Wilbur Fisk](#) (1792-1839), D. D., and the first graduate of a college program among the American Methodist ministers led the fortunes of Wesleyan. [Stephen Olin](#) (1797-1851), a graduate of Middlebury, was the initial head of Randolph-Macon. Their classical academic backgrounds stood in marked contrast to Robert Paine's, as did their attitudes toward slavery. Policy issues also distinguished Fisk and Olin from Paine. Olin was among those who at the national Methodist conference in 1844 called upon Bishop James Andrew, his friend, to resign his post on the grounds that he was a slave-owner. Fisk too opposed slavery and while holding the abolitionist view to be too extreme, supported the repatriation of slaves to Africa.⁸⁸³ In both cases, their attitudes toward slavery were sterner than Paine, who was attempting to sustain his college in the midst of the Tennessee Valley.

The lack of qualified students. As serious as the financial situation was, and the rising competition for available students, the gravest challenge was the dearth of qualified students to fill the classes at La Grange and Alabama. Indeed, in 1838 only six qualified students could be found to populate the freshman class in Tuscaloosa. Alva Woods replacement, Basil Manly, warned the Board of Trustees that social conditions were such in the state that no near-term improvement in the number of students should be anticipated. "Low as the University has placed its requirements for admission," he reported deplorably, "the

⁸⁸² Smith, George Gilman. [*The History of Methodism in Georgia and Florida: From 1785 to 1865.*](#) Macon, GA: Jno. W. Burke & Co. 1871, p. 502; Richard Henderson . [*The Life of Robert Paine D.D. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.*](#) Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South. Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1916, p. 64.

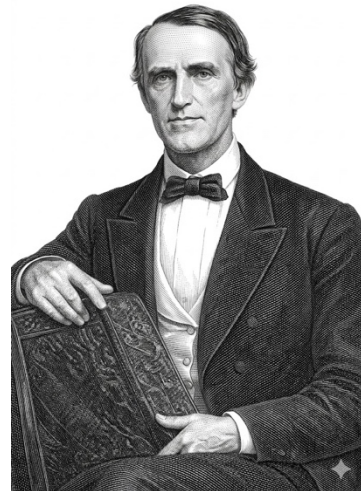
⁸⁸³ "[Wesleyan's First President.](#)" Wesleyan University. Online. Accessed Wednesday, October 1, 2025; "[Stephen Olin.](#)" *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed Wednesday, October 1, 2025; Olin, Stephen. [*The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin.*](#) Two Volumes. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853. Internet Archive; Holdich, Joseph. [*Wilbur Fisk, D. D.: First President of Wesleyan University.*](#) New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842. Internet Archive

schools in the country seem unprepared to meet them.” If the University was to succeed, he concluded, the quality of education throughout Alabama would have to be elevated.⁸⁸⁴ Faltering steps were made over the next couple of decades, only to be halted by the outbreak of the Civil War.

And yet, the competition for competent students continued to increase. The roots of the principal Baptist college in 19th century Alabama, Howard College, can trace its roots to 1841 in Marion, Barbour County. The charter was obtained from the state, and S. S. Sherman and Solon Lindsey began offering classes there. Its first years would be rocky ones, a savage fire destroying its one building and its scientific apparatus. At least the library was saved, and a new building was opened in 1846.⁸⁸⁵ In this same period, the Baptists turned their attention to the education of women. The first session of the Judson Female Institute opened in Perry County in January 1939. [Milo Parket Jewett](#) was Judson’s first president.

Henry Tutwiler (1807-1884).

Joining the ranks of the La Grange faculty in January 1840, was the Virginian and former faculty member at the University of Alabama, Henry Tutwiler, whose teaching exploits have already been featured. His strong classical training at the University of Virginia set him apart from many of his colleagues and his commitment to learning made him a favorite with all students.⁸⁸⁶ Henry Tutwiler had matriculated at Thomas Jefferson’s university in its first year and after graduation in 1829 entered the school of law and taught for a



67. Henry Tutwiler. La Grange College & University of Alabama

⁸⁸⁴ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, p. 49; James Benson Sellers. *History of the University of Alabama*. Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 145.

⁸⁸⁵ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, pp. 195-196.

⁸⁸⁶ Smith, William Russell. [Reminiscences of a Long Life, Historical, Political, Personal and Literary](#). Washington, D. C.: Published by the author. 1889, pp. 228-229; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 8;

while before being recruited by James Birney and assuming his post in ancient languages at the University of Alabama, where he had remained until 1837. While in Tuscaloosa, he appears to have returned to Charlottesville long enough to receive the award of his Master of Arts degree in 1835. While he had accrued sufficient credits during his initial tenure there to qualify for the award, the M. A. had not yet been established by the University at the time of his graduation.⁸⁸⁷

At La Grange, Tutwiler initially filled the mathematics chair replacing the departed Ellison, whose mathematics chair had been vacant for some time. When Barbour left La Grange in 1842, Tutwiler also filled the chemistry vacancy. It is not clear what impelled Henry Tutwiler to leave his post at the Marion school; it could have been that its financial position was more imperiled than that in which La Grange found itself.⁸⁸⁸ Certainly, the collegial relationship that he would build at La Grange with President Robert Paine was in stark contrast to the strained and hostile relationship with President Alva Woods, 1831-36.⁸⁸⁹ He would remain at La Grange for six years, departing at the same time as Robert Paine. He would subsequently inscribe his name on the ledger of leading Alabama educators for his headship of the classical [Greene Springs Academy](#), which he headed until shortly before his death.⁸⁹⁰ Twice during his time as headmaster, he would be offered and decline, the presidency of the University of Alabama.⁸⁹¹ It should be noted that while he was active in the American

⁸⁸⁷ Willis G. Clark. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part II. Denominational Colleges and Seminaries, pp. 192-193; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1694; McCorvey, Thomas Chalmers. "[Henry Tutwiler, and the Influence of the University of Virginia on Education in Alabama](#)." *Alabama Historical Society. Reprint No. 32*, pp. 83-106.; from *The Transactions*, Vol. V (1904). Montgomery, AHS, 1905, pp. 85-86, p. 91.

⁸⁸⁸ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 14.

⁸⁸⁹ Windham, Kevin Lee. [Southern Honor and Northern Piety: Henry Tutwiler, Alva Woods, and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831-1837](#). Ph. D dissertation. University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa 2010.

⁸⁹⁰ "[Henry Tutwiler, and the Influence of the University of Virginia on Education in Alabama](#)." *Alabama Historical Society. Reprint No. 32*, pp. 83-106.; from *The Transactions*, Vol. V (1904). Montgomery, AHS, 1905, p. 104.

⁸⁹¹ Tutwiler, Pascal A. "[A History of Dr. Henry Tutwiler and his famous daughter, Julia Tutwiler](#)." *The Greensboro Watchman*, February 3, 1977. Landmark Series, no. 12. Crude digital copy available in University of West Alabama's [West Alabama Digital Library Collections](#); McCorvey, Thomas Chalmers. "[Henry Tutwiler, and the Influence of the University of Virginia on Education in](#)

Colonization Society and passionately rejected slavery as evil and a blight upon the south, he was nevertheless a slaveholder, at least by the time he left La Grange to open the Greene Springs School. There on their 1,500 acres, he and Julia directed the labor of as many as 20 enslaved people. Like the Hobbs family, the Tutwilers did ignore state prohibitions of slave literacy and taught the enslaved who were interested to read and write, giving them bibles. Julia and the other children helped teach the slaves to read.⁸⁹² One of his slaves, who accompanied son Hal Tutwiler (1845 – 1928) into Civil War battle, compiled reminiscences that are housed in the archive of the University of Alabama.⁸⁹³

In his private life, Henry and his wife Julia Ashe, great granddaughter of Samuel Ashe, Governor of North Carolina, would have eleven children, two of whom, daughter Gessner Harrison Tutwiler (1862 – 1934) and son Carlos Smith Tutwiler (1855 – 1920) would be named in honor of close lifelong friends. His daughter [Julia Strudwick Tutwiler](#) (1841 -1916) would become a celebrated name in her own right, and a strong voice for the educational rights of women, women's suffrage, and prison reform.⁸⁹⁴ Tutwiler and family made it through the ravages of the war better than most Alabamians. Although many Green Springs former students died in the war, the school survived the physical destruction that plagued so many other schools, like La Grange. Hal Tutwiler escaped his battles during the Civil War unscathed, although Legrand, the slave who accompanied him to war was wounded and underwent lengthy recuperation. And, fortuitously, Henry's fiscal assets were invested in northern railroads that remained intact during the war; of course, the war stripped most southerners of their fortunes. According to a memoir by Pascal Tutwiler, Henry's son, a

[Alabama](#)." *Alabama Historical Society*. Reprint No. 32, pp. 83-106.; from *The Transactions*, Vol. V (1904). Montgomery, AHS, 1905, p. 104.

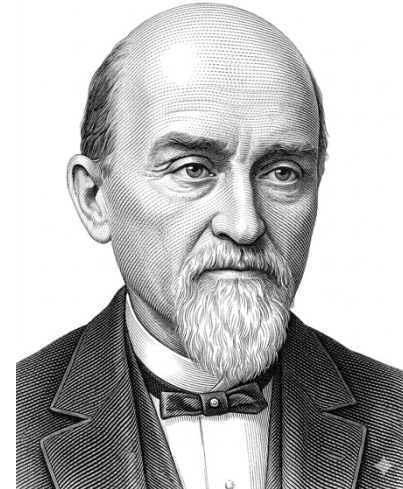
⁸⁹² Pannell, Anne Gary and Dorthea E. Wyatt. [Julia S. Tutwiler and social Progress in Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. Reprint, pps. xvii, 8.

⁸⁹³ Tutwiler, Legrand. [Miscellaneous document - Recollections of Legrand Tutwiler, former slave of Dr. Henry Tutwiler \(photocopy\)](#). Citation available online. Copy in Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Alabama; Meriweather, W. A. "[Remember When: Memoirs of a Former Slave](#)." *Leaf Chronicle*. Online. Accessed October 30, 2025

⁸⁹⁴ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1695; McCorvey, Thomas Chalmers. "[Henry Tutwiler, and the Influence of the University of Virginia on Education in Alabama](#)." *Alabama Historical Society*. Reprint No. 32, pp. 83-106.; from *The Transactions*, Vol. V (1904). Montgomery, AHS, 1905, p. 105; "[Tutwiler, Henry](#)." *Find A Grave*. Online. Accessed October 30, 2025.

northern friend who had been instructed to sell and put the money into Confederate currency had failed to do so. The stock appreciated during the war, and when finally liquidated after hostilities returned a significant windfall to the family.⁸⁹⁵

Carlos Smith. Shortly after his arrival at La Grange, Tutwiler would forge a lifelong relationship with another faculty member, [Carlos Green Smith](#) (1813 -1892). Smith was a gifted Georgian, who attended the University of Nashville, teaching mathematics and ancient languages at the college upon graduation. After two years, he left for the University of Louisville to study medicine, leaving those studies in 1843 to accept the chair of ancient languages at La Grange. The impetus for that decision is not known. At La Grange, he became a close friend of Tutwiler's during those three or four years they were on the mountain together. Smith left the college at the same time as Tutwiler and Paine.⁸⁹⁶ With their departure, historians and chroniclers have suggested La Grange's best years were behind it.⁸⁹⁷



68 Carlos Smith La Grange College &
President of University of Alabama

Smith returned to the University of Pennsylvania to complete his medical degree before yielding to the opportunity to join Tutwiler at his endeavor at Greene Springs School.⁸⁹⁸ Subsequently, he would leave the Tutwiler relationship to accept the role of headmaster at the noted Huntsville Green Academy. Just before the outbreak of war, he would open in 1859 his own Mountain Home Academy near Courtland, Alabama, not far from La Grange College. However, his school would be razed by the conflagration of war, and he would return to Huntsville where he continued

⁸⁹⁵ Tutwiler, Pascal A. "[A History of Dr. Henry Tutwiler and his famous daughter, Julia Tutwiler.](#)" *The Greensboro Watchman*, February 3, 1977. Landmark Series, no. 12. Crude digital copy available in University of West Alabama's [West Alabama Digital Library Collections](#).

⁸⁹⁶ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1695.

⁸⁹⁷ W. L. McDonald. *Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*. Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9.

⁸⁹⁸ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 193.

to teach from 1865 until 1874.⁸⁹⁹ In 1874, the University of Alabama once more embarked on a presidential search in the wake of the resignation of President Lupton. Among the candidates the trustees first choice was Henry Tutwiler. However, that nomination was withdrawn a day after being offered, perhaps because of his requirement for a five-year tenured appointment. After several other false starts, with offers inside and outside of Alabama, the offer was extended to headmaster Carlos Green Smith, who accepted the role at age 61. His M.D. from Pennsylvania was the only earned doctorate held by a University president during those early post-war years. The school, struggling with the impacts of war and reconstruction, prospered during his years, growing from 74 enrollees at the time he began to 179 upon his departure four years later.⁹⁰⁰ His departure 1878 would be abrupt, and acrimonious, resulting in the appointment of General Josiah Gorgas as the new President.⁹⁰¹

Leaving the University, Smith moved to Livingston, Alabama.⁹⁰² While there, he renewed his relationship with the Tutwiler family. In the aftermath of the civil war, Alabama established several state-supported normal schools to produce teachers for the public school system established before the conflict. The normal schools were designed to ensure teachers for those post-war public schools. The curriculum was far simpler than the pre-war classical curriculum of the universities, and was of shorter duration, enabling both men and women to achieve certification as teachers in two years. For those agreeing to teach in the Alabama public schools for two years, tuition would be waived in the normal program.⁹⁰³

One of those schools was established in Livingston. Carlos Green Smith became its principal. In 1850, Carlos Green Smith had married [Martha Strudwick Ashe](#) (1828 – 1897) the sister of [Julia Ashe Tutwiler](#),

⁸⁹⁹ “[Carlos Green Smith](#).” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed October 29, 2025; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1575.

⁹⁰⁰ Sellers, James Benson. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, p. 828.

⁹⁰¹ Sellers, James Benson. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 321 -324.

⁹⁰² “Smith, Carlos Green. [The National Cyclopedic of American Biography](#), Vol. XII. New York: James T. White and Co., 1904. p. 295.

⁹⁰³ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. “[The South’s Oldest State Teacher’s College](#).” *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), pp. 282-288.

Henry's wife.⁹⁰⁴ He assumed the Livingston principalship in 1878, where he remained until 1886, failing health forcing his retirement and a move to Palatka, Florida.⁹⁰⁵ He assumed a co-superintendency with his niece [Julia Strudwick Tutwiler](#) who arrived in 1881 to serve that joint capacity with him.⁹⁰⁶ Following Carlos' retirement, the next co-principal with Julia was [James William Albert Wright](#) (1834 – 1894). Deepening the nepotism, he was married to [Margaret Tutwiler](#) (1838 -1894), Julia's sister. He was a former student at Greene Springs and graduate of Princeton.⁹⁰⁷ Upon Wright's retirement at the normal college, Julia served as principal for two decades.⁹⁰⁸

Before leaving [Carlos Smith](#) and his departure from the normal school in Livingston, Alabama for retirement in Palatka, Florida, one more observation is in order. Carlos and his wife [Martha Strudwick Ashe Smith](#) had four children. The third, [Paoli Ashe Smith](#) (1860 -1892) married [Gessner Harrison Tutwiler](#) (1862-1934). She was the daughter of Martha's sister, [Julia Ashe Tutwiler](#), who of course was married to [Henry](#). Tragically, Paoli would die young as consequence of a fiery train wreck. Paoli and Gessner had one son, [Paoli Ashe Smith](#) (1892 – 1972), a journalist and

⁹⁰⁴“Carlos Green Smith.” [Find a Grave](#). Online. Accessed October 30, 2025.

⁹⁰⁵ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, pp. 1811-1812, p. 1576.

⁹⁰⁶ The story of the remarkable Julia Tutwiler merits close examination on its own. Some useful sources to examine are: Moore, Eoline Wallace. “[Julia Tutwiler, Teacher](#).” *Birmingham-Southern College Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 1934); Pannell, Anne Gary and Dortha E. Wyatt. [Julia S. Tutwiler and social Progress in Alabama](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. Reprint. Google Books citation, partial digital copy; Pruitt, Paul M. “[Julia S. Tutwiler: The Burdens of Paternalism and Race](#).” In Susan Youngblood Ashmore and Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *Alabama Women*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, n. d.; Pruitt, Paul M. [Taming Alabama: Lawyers and Reformers, 1804-1929](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. UT Libraries. Ebsco eBook. Digital Editions temporary download. Chapter 3 is entitled “Julia Tutwiler: Preparation for a Lifetime of Reform.” Tutwiler, Pascal A. “[A History of Dr. Henry Tutwiler and his famous daughter, Julia Tutwiler](#).” *The Greensboro Watchman*, February 3, 1977. Landmark Series, no. 12. Crude digital copy available in University of West Alabama's [West Alabama Digital Library Collections](#). The West Alabama archive offers other documentation on Julia.

⁹⁰⁷ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, pp. 1811-1812, pp. 1694-1695.

⁹⁰⁸ Pruitt, Paul M. “[Julia S. Tutwiler: The Burdens of Paternalism and Race](#).” In Susan Youngblood Ashmore and Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *Alabama Women*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, n. d, p. 108; Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, pp. 1811-1812, pp. 1694-1695.

insurance agent. A modest collection of his papers is available in the special collections of the University of Alabama libraries.

Robert Paine and the schism of the Methodist Church

Just as President Paine was struggling with the impacts of a failing economy and rising competition for students, he was also playing a leading role in the splintering of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of slavery. The 1844–1845 schism of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) remains one of the most defining ruptures in American Protestant history. Though often reduced in popular memory to the 'Bishop Andrew controversy,' the split was in fact the product of several decades of accumulating tension over slavery, church polity, and regional autonomy. The episode pitted Wesleyan antislavery convictions against a rising Southern proslavery theology and revealed deep cracks in the institutional foundation of American Methodism.⁹⁰⁹

John Wesley's original prohibition against slaveholding among Methodists stood in stark contrast to the economic and legal realities of the American South. As early as 1780, Wesley had condemned slavery as 'the sum of all villainies,' and his American followers initially adopted strictures against it in their Discipline.⁹¹⁰ At conference in 1784, the American Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, and in keeping with Wesley's vision passed a rule that within one year, Methodists should free their slaves. But few paid attention to the edict, and church leadership fretted about the widening split in the membership, noting growing antislavery and abolitionist sentiment in the north, and unyielding commitment to sustaining slavery as the economic backbone of the south. By the Methodist Conference of 1816, the *Committee on Slavery* reluctantly

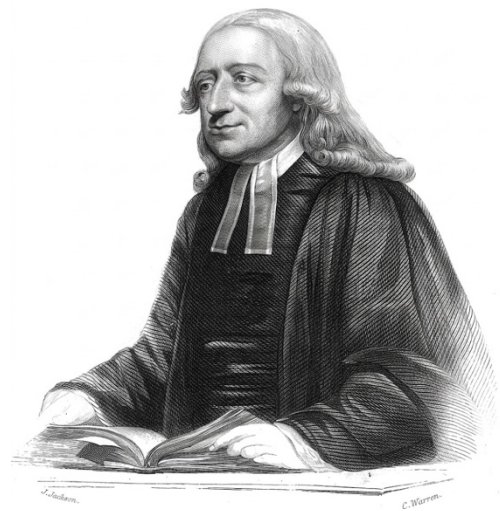


Figure 69. John Wesley 1

⁹⁰⁹ Lawrence, Brian D. [*The Relationship Between the Methodist Church, Slavery and Politics, 1784-1844*](#). Ph D. Dissertation. Rowan University, 2018; Matthews, Donald G. *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780 – 1845*. Princeton University Press: 1965.

⁹¹⁰ Wesley, John. [*Thoughts Upon Slavery*](#). London: R. Hawes, 1774.

reported that “under the present existing circumstances in relation to slavery little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice.”⁹¹¹

And so, the Methodist Church lumbered on, maintaining an ethical commitment to a principle roundly rejected by a significant majority of its membership. [Orange Scott](#) (1800-1847) is a good example of early American Methodist followers of John Wesley. Scott, a delegate to 1832, 1836, and 1840 General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was a prominent abolitionist who chafed at the denomination’s unwillingness to confront the slavery issue. In his 1836 *Address to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Scott delivered a short history of Wesleyan attitudes against slavery and argued for delegates to embrace abolitionism. But his appeal fell on deaf ears and the conference roundly rejected abolitionism. He attended one more conference in 1840, the year James Birney stood for president on the abolitionist ticket, and encountering continuing recalcitrance, elected to withdraw from membership. In 1843, he would become one of the founders of the [Wesleyan Methodist Church](#), which advocated for both abolition and women’s suffrage.⁹¹²

By 1843, 26,000 Methodists owned nearly 210,000 slaves, 1,200 of these being the “property” of preachers.⁹¹³ As the denomination expanded across the South, economic dependency on enslaved labor made such antislavery provisions increasingly untenable. Gradual compromises emerged. The Methodist Episcopal Church began inserting escape clauses like ‘unless under the laws of the state’ or ‘if practicable.’ These concessions would eventually hollow out Wesley’s vision, leaving Southern Methodists to claim obedience to church law while simultaneously ignoring its original

⁹¹¹ O’Brien, Glen. “[Methodist Religion Among the Soldiers of the American Civil War](#),” *Aldersgate Papers*, Vo. 7 (September 2009), p. 92.

⁹¹² Scott, Orange. [Address to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church During its Session in Cincinnati, Ohio, May 19, 1836](#). New York: H. R. Piercy, 1836. Watson, Brandon. “[Research Guides: Emory University and Slavery: Slavery and Methodism](#).” Online. Cites Orange Scott from the copy of Journal of the Georgia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Manuscript, 1831-1845. Available in Pitts Theological Library. RG 025-4, Box 9; Scott, Orange. [Grounds of Secession from the M. E. Church or, Book for the Times, Being and Examination of her Connection with Slavery, and also of her forms of Government](#). New York: Published by L. C. Matlack for the Wesleyan Methodist Connections of America, 1851.

⁹¹³ O’Brien, Glen. “[Methodist Religion Among the Soldiers of the American Civil War](#),” *Aldersgate Papers*, Vo. 7 (September 2009), p. 92.

moral core. By the 1830s, Northern and Southern Methodists operated under functionally divergent moral systems. The issue was not only theological but structural: who could dictate the moral boundaries of the Church? The first signs of organizational fracture appeared well before 1844, particularly in debates over slaveholding by ministers and bishops.⁹¹⁴ As things would emerge, Robert Paine became a *de facto* leader of the slaveholding faction of the church, apparently dating from his years at La Grange, his dependence upon the planter elite of the Tennessee Valley for patronage, and his close relationship with Turner Saunders, chair of his board of trustees and father-in-law. A summary from the *Robert Paine Papers* at Emory University declares that he owned slaves in both Davidson County Tennessee and in Franklin County, Alabama, the site of La Grange College.⁹¹⁵ At the time of his departure from La Grange in 1846, Robert Paine and his wife were already controlling the labor of 75 slaves.⁹¹⁶

During the last years of Paine's presidency, the issue reached the breaking point for the church. By the Conference of 1844, the majority of the Methodist Episcopal Church, already shaken by the breakaway Wesleyan Methodist Church, would make no further accommodations to the slaveholding south. When the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in New York (May–June 1844), two slavery-related cases dominated debate: the appeal of Rev. Francis A. Harding (1813 – 1872) of the Baltimore Conference and the status of Bishop James Osgood Andrew of Georgia.

The case of Harding has been eclipsed by the subsequent elevation by southern Methodists to martyrdom, but it was equally pivotal in driving the church to its breakpoint. Born to a Methodist minister, after a trial itinerancy he was ordained a deacon and served in circuits in Virginia and Maryland. In February 1844, he married Anne Swann who brought her

⁹¹⁴ Bascom, Henry B. [Methodism and Slavery](#). Frankfort, Ky: Hodges, Todd and Pruett, 1845; Carwardine, Richard. "[Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War](#)," *Church History* Vol. 69, NO. 3 (September 2000) pp.578 – 609; Lawrence, Brian D. [The Relationship Between the Methodist Church, Slavery and Politics, 1784-1844](#). Ph D. Dissertation. Rowan University, 2018.

⁹¹⁵ [Robert Paine Papers](#). Pitts Special Collections and Archives. Emory Libraries. Emory University. Online Collection Synopsis. Accessed October 14, 2025. The record is largely silent on the manner of acquisition of enslaved people by Paine. Like Bishop Andrew, it is possible that inheritances through his marriages to Susanna Beck (Davidson County) and Mary Elizabeth Millwater (Franklin County) were the primary means.

⁹¹⁶ "[Slave Breeding Bishops](#)." *Signal of Liberty*, August 8, 1846. Online.

slaves into the marriage. There is no indication that Harding owned any slaves beforehand and under Maryland law, the slaves remained the property of Anne. In March of that year at the Methodist General Conference, the fact that Harding was now a slaveholder was brought to the attention of the delegates, a conference committee investigated the situation and requested that he free the slaves, which he refused to do. Upon his refusal, his ministry was suspended.⁹¹⁷

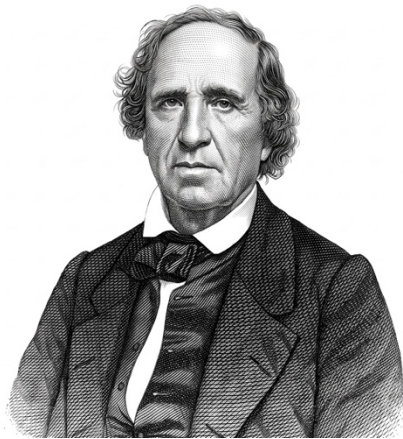


Figure 70 James Osgood Andrew. Methodist Bishop and slaveowner

James Osgood Andrew had risen rapidly through the Methodist itinerancy and was elected Bishop at the 1832 General Conference in Philadelphia. Apparently, over the course of years, Andrew, through gift and through marriage(s), became a slaveholder. His first wife, Anna Amelia Macfarlane, whom he married in 1816, brought slaves into the family, as did his second wife, Leonora Greenwood, whom he had married before the 1844 General Conference. Additionally, there was at least one other slave, a young female, gifted directly to the bishop. Only she entered history with a first name, “Kitty;” the others are unknown.⁹¹⁸ The Conference mood had been sharpened by the Harding case from the borderland Baltimore Conference. If a traveling minister could be adjudged to be compromised by slaveholding, the majority reasoned, then a bishop, whose role encompassed connections across the whole of the Methodist Episcopal Church, should be held to an even higher bar. His case became the culminating test of a decade of stiffening anti-slavery discipline within the church. In the end, despite concerted southern efforts to legitimate the on-going role of Andrew as bishop, and the

⁹¹⁷ “[Reverend Francis Asbury Harding](#).” *Find a Grave*. Accessed October 22, 2025.

⁹¹⁸ Auslander, Mark. [The Accidental Slaveowner: Revisiting a Myth of Race and Finding an American Family](#). Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011; “[Enslaved Peoples Identified in Personal Papers](#),” *Emory University and Slavery*, Emory University, Emory Libraries. Accessed October 22, 2025; “[James Osgood Andrew](#)”. *Wikipedia*. Accessed October 22, 2025; “[Kitty Andrew Shell: The Enslaved Woman at the Center of the Methodist Schism of 1844](#).” *Vanishing Georgia*. Online. Accessed October 22, 2025.

readiness of the conferees to find compromise, the anti-slavery sentiments prevailed. Several Conference representatives leading the southern resistance had ties to La Grange and joined in resolution urging him not to resign.⁹¹⁹ Winans, Capers, Green and Maddin were among them. [William Winans](#) was a trustee of the college, and at the conference described himself combatively as “a slaveholder for conscience’s sake.”⁹²⁰ [William Capers](#) was said to have been recruited for the initial presidency at La Grange.⁹²¹ [A.L.P. Green](#), another slaveholder within the Church, was a longtime friend and associate of Robert Paine, and a vocal supporter of La Grange College, actively supporting it through the Methodist Conferences.⁹²² Influential Methodist minister [Thomas Maddin](#) was the father of three La Grange graduates, [Dr. Thomas Lafayette Maddin](#), who would play a key role in the founding of Vanderbilt University; Dr. John W. Maddin, and Professor Ferdinand P. Maddin, who spent his career in Waco, Texas.⁹²³ Robert Paine, also in attendance, was not among those southerners pressing Andrew to resist.

⁹¹⁹ Smith, George Gilman. [The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1882, pp. 341-342. The southern delegates presenting Andrew with a resolution encouraging his refusal to vacate his post were Leroy M. Lee, Peter Doub, James Jamieson, William Capers, William M. Wightman, Charles Betts, H. A. C. Walker, George F. Pierce, William J. Parks, L. Pierce, John W. Glenn, James E. Evans, A. B. Longstreet, Jesse Boring, J. Hamilton, William Murrah, G. Garrett, William Winans, Benjamin M. Drake, John Lane, G. M. Rogers, L. Fowler, J. Clark, J. C. Parker, W. P. Ratcliffe, A. Hunter, G. W. D. Harris, Samuel S. Moody, William McMahon, Thomas Joiner, E. F. Sevier, Samuel Patton, Thomas Stringfield H. B. Bascom, William Gunn, H. H. Kavanaugh, E. Stephenson, B. T. Crouch, George W. Brush, W. W. Redman, William Patton, J. C. Berryman, J. M. Jamieson, J. B. McFerrin, A. L. P. Green, Thomas Madden, Jonathan Stamper, and N. G. Berryman. Robert Paine seems not to be among the number issuing the resolution.

⁹²⁰ Brockwell, Charles W. “[Schisms and Their Healing in American Methodism](#).” *Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies*. Oxford: University of Oxford. Keble College, 1982, p. 5.

⁹²¹ Albert Micajah Shipp. [The History of Methodism in South Carolina](#). Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, p. 430.

⁹²² Green, Rev. William M. [The Life and Letters of A. L. P. Green](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877, p. 168, 255; , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 122; Lazenby, Marion Elias. [History of Methodism in Alabama and West Florida. Being an Account of the Amazing March of Methodism through Alabama and West Florida](#). Parthenon Press, 1960, p. 1023.

⁹²³ William S. Speer. [Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans: containing biographies and records of many of the families who have attained prominence in Tennessee](#). Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2003, p.56. Internet Archive; George Derby, James Terry White. *National*

As a result of the imbroglio between North and South, the Conference adopted the “[Finley](#) Resolution,” directing that Bishop Andrew desist from the exercise of his office so long as this “impediment” remains—the impediment being his relation to slavery.⁹²⁴ Voting for the measure were 62% of the attendees (110-68) directing him to “desist from the exercise of his office so long as this impediment remains.”⁹²⁵ He was not removed from office, nor was he asked to resign, and he continued to be paid as a bishop. But by refusing to comply, he could not travel the Methodist connection among the northern churches or otherwise discharge the primary duties of the bishopric.⁹²⁶ The resolution precipitated the denomination’s formal steps toward separation.

To Robert Paine fell the administrative role of formulating “The Plan of Separation” and the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Joining him on the committee were eight other ministers from both sides of the Methodist church, who would deal with the separation of assets and determine the resources that would be distributed to the departing southern churchmen. The committee completed its work and presented the Plan on June 7.⁹²⁷ Before leaving New York, the southerners agreed to hold their first conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in

Cyclopedia of American Biography. Vol. VIII. New York: James T. White & Company. 1898, pp. 136-137.

⁹²⁴ Denbow, Jenny. “[Methodism and Slavery](#).” Undergraduate research paper. Religion 312.

College unknown. Online. 78Ohio.org, 2000; Mathews, Donald G. [Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1945](#). Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978, pp. 260-64, p.

260; “[Finley, James Bradley](#).” *NCpedia*. Online. Accessed October 22, 2025; Green, Rev.

William M. [The Life and Letters of A. L. P. Green](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing

House, 1877, p. 152; Norwood, John Nelson. [The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics](#). Alfred N.Y.: The Alfred Press, Alfred

University, 1923. Internet Archive; Mathews, Donald G. *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780 – 1845*. Princeton University Press: 1965.

⁹²⁵ Brockwell, Charles W. “[Schisms and Their Healing in American Methodism](#).” *Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies*. Oxford: University of Oxford. Keble College, 1982, p. 5.

⁹²⁶ Mathews, Donald G. [Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1945](#). Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978, pp. 260-64.

⁹²⁷ Norwood, John Nelson. [The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics](#). Alfred N.Y.: The Alfred Press, Alfred University, 1923. Internet Archive, p. 84. The other members were Filmore, Akers, Bangs, Crowder, Sargent, Winans, Hamline, and Porter.

Louisville in May 1845.⁹²⁸ There were now two American Methodist churches, the southern one embracing the institution of slavery. The divisions would not reunite until 1939.

Turnover at La Grange.

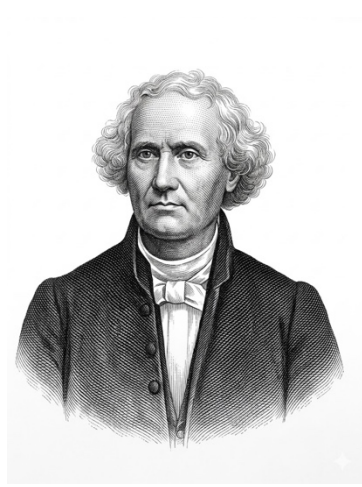


Figure 71. William Capers,
Methodist Bishop

Paine returned to La Grange after the historic conference, but his time there was now limited. At the General Conference of 1846 in Petersburg, Virginia the General Conference of the Southern Methodist church appointed two bishops. Bishop Soule was aged and disabled, and Bishop Andrew needed associates to further the work of the southern church. It was all but ordained that two of the architects of the church rupture, Bishop Capers and Bishop Paine would be awarded Southern Methodist bishoprics. Immediately after the news, from the stronghold of capitalist agriculture, Ohio, the northern church levied an angry blast at their southern

counterparts:

Here the Southern Church has now three slaveholding bishops, ranking among the first class of slaveholders in Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama. This sanctifies slavery, of course. It is now certainly a holy thing. Slaveholding and slave breeding are now sanctified by the three holiest men in the South. They are not, it is true, such petty slave-breeders as the little breeders of Virginia and the more Northern slave states, who have just a few selected breeders. The new bishops have whole families which increase without any studied plan of slave-growing. Yet, slave-breeders these bishops are unless they set the young progeny free, and this is not likely because brother Crowder taught us affectionately at Cincinnati in 1836 that female slaves of Southern Methodist preachers are better clothed than the wives of Northern Methodist ministers.⁹²⁹

In 1845, soon after the schism, La Grange trustee chair Rev. Turner Saunders sold his property in Lawrence County and moved to Aberdeen

⁹²⁸ Norwood, John Nelson. [*The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics*](#). Alfred N.Y.: The Alfred Press, Alfred University, 1923. Internet Archive. 1923, p. 91.

⁹²⁹ "Slave Breeding Bishops." [*Signal of Liberty*](#), August 8, 1846. Reprinted in the *Western Christian Advocate*. Online.

Mississippi, purchasing 2,880 acres for cotton production. On the outskirts of town, he bought another twenty acres for his residence, completed in 1848.⁹³⁰ Shortly after the initial purchase, Paine and his wife left La Grange and joined the Turners in Aberdeen. Turner Saunders knew that his health was failing, and he wished for step-daughter Mary Eliza and. Robert to live in the new plantation home with he and his wife Henrietta. The Paines joined them at “Minko,” the family mansion. Turner died in 1853 and the property was bequeathed to Henrietta, the Paines purchasing it from her in 1857. Paine became an active planter, supervising over three thousand acres and more than fifty slaves. In a typical year, the plantation yielded 5,000 bushels of corn, almost a thousand acres of sweet potatoes and more than 300 bales of cotton. During the Civil War, Paine seldom left Mississippi, leaving the bulk of the duties of the episcopacy to the other bishops.⁹³¹

Faculty Turnover. [Richard Henderson Rivers](#), Paine’s biographer, La Grange graduate, and professor of Latin and Greek since 1837, had departed in 1843 for an administrative appointment elsewhere. His successor in the classroom was none other than Carlos Smith. Rivers was nearby, in Athens, where he headed up the reputable Tennessee Methodist Conference Female Institute.⁹³² He remained there for five years, before taking up the presidency of [Centenary College of Louisiana](#). In 1853, he would reappear at La Grange, this time in a senior capacity at a pivotal moment in the college’s history.

⁹³⁰ “[Saunders-Paine House](#).” *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. United States Department of Interior. Digitally available from Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Online. Accessed November 5, 2025. Mississippi registration [received by National Park Service](#) August 14, 2017. Saunders, James Edmonds and Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 329.

⁹³¹ [Saunders-Paine House](#).” *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. United States Department of Interior. Digitally available from Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Online. Accessed November 5, 2025. Mississippi registration [received by National Park Service](#) August 14, 2017. Saunders, James Edmonds and Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 329.

⁹³² Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 622; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 13; Walter B. Posey. [La Grange: Alabama’s Earliest College](#). Birmingham Southern College Bulletin, XXVI (November 1933), p. 7.

Carlos Smith's replacement in Latin and Greek in 1846 was [Burr Hamilton McCown](#), D.D.(1806-1881), who converted to the Methodist religion in 1826. As a student at St. Joseph's College in Bardstown, Kentucky, McCown took highest honors in Latin and Greek, was teaching at Transylvania by 1842, and would have been qualified to fill that role at La Grange.⁹³³ He served in that capacity for only a year and was followed by N. A. Penland.

Nicholas A. Penland was minister of the Tuscumbia Presbyterian Church during this period. While the extent of his classical training in Latin and Greek has not yet been determined, Presbyterian ministers of this period were more likely to have at least some formal education than their itinerant Methodist and Baptist counterparts. But his initial appointment in the first years following Robert Paine's departure also represented something of an administrative convenience. He would remain in that role for three years, when his tenure at the nearby Tuscumbia Church also terminated.⁹³⁴ The impetus for his departure may have been a tragedy that visited Rev. Penland and his wife. Records for the Tuscumbia Oakwood Cemetery reveal that the two suffered the shocking loss of son Matthew Wallace and daughter Mary Jane within the same hour on August 5, 1851. In the same year, they mourned the loss of an unnamed infant daughter.⁹³⁵

The cause of their loss is not known, but epidemics of smallpox, cholera and malaria were realities in that time. After the start of term, the year before there had been a smallpox outbreak/panic at La Grange that resulted in the suspension of instruction for about a month, not resuming until mid-March, 1850. Several students were removed some distance from the college and quarantined for the duration of the outbreak. The

⁹³³ "[Burr Hamilton McCown](#)", *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed November 2, 2025; Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 628; W. L. McDonald. *Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*. Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 8.

⁹³⁴ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p, 59-60; Keller, Capt. Arthur Henley Keller. *History of Tuscumbia, Alabama*. Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, 1981. [Online version here](#). See entry under "Churches;" Nina Leftwich. [Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, p. 145.

⁹³⁵ [Colbert County, Alabama Cemeteries: Township 4, Range 11. Oakwood – Tuscumbia](#). As surveyed by the WPA. Online. Accessed November 3, 2025

physician at the time was G. E. Kumpe. There had been no recorded smallpox outbreak in the 30 years previously.⁹³⁶

The Penlands moved to Texas in 1853, taking with them slaves they had recently purchased.⁹³⁷ Their destination was Huntsville Texas, and the Presbyterian Austin College, opened in 1850 under the presidency of [Samuel McKinney](#).⁹³⁸ Baldly drawing upon the patronage of Trustees Chair General Sam Houston, N. A. Penland, a nephew of the general's by marriage, was reluctantly hired by President McKinney. McKinney resigned soon afterwards, perhaps partly because of the pressures of the Board regarding Penland and other matters. The intrigue continuing, Penland was named *president pro tem*, until the new President arrived. Daniel Baker, who knew Penland from his appearances at Presbyterian revivals in Tuscumbia, accepted the presidency. Penland's tenure was a rocky one as rumors of heavy alcohol consumption circulated in Huntsville from the time of his arrival. Within a year he was charged by the Huntsville Presbyterian congregation of insobriety, and his membership was revoked. A short time later, he resigned from his role at Austin College and died in 1856.⁹³⁹

⁹³⁶ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 625; Barnard, Harry V. "[LaGrange College: A Historical Sketch](#)." *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, p. 16; Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933). Hathi Trust. Online.

⁹³⁷ "[Lucy and Leven Curry Searching for their Relatives](#)." *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (New Orleans). June 9, 1981. Online. Accessed November 3, 2025.

⁹³⁸ Humphries, Jack W. "[Old Austin College in Huntsville: An Early Chapter in East Texas Educational History](#)." *East Texas Educational Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1., p. 28.

⁹³⁹ Humphries, Jack W. "[Old Austin College in Huntsville: An Early Chapter in East Texas Educational History](#)." *East Texas Educational Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1., p. 28; Keller, Capt. Arthur Henley Keller. *History of Tuscumbia, Alabama*. Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, 1981. [Online version here](#).

The new President. Rev. Edward Wadsworth (1811 – 1883). A

North Carolinian, Edward was born to Thomas and Eleanor Wadsworth, growing up the son of a merchant in New Berne, one of the oldest (1710) English-settled towns in the state. At 18, he was converted to Methodism and was licensed to preach in 1831 in the Virginia Conference—the North Carolina Conference not yet being formed (1840). The young preacher enrolled in another Methodist college, Randolph-Macon and received his B. A. in 1841. While enrolled, he also served as the college chaplain, staying there long enough to take the M. A. degree in 1844. His training at Randolph-Macon was in moral philosophy, and his textbook was Frances Wayland's *The Elements of Moral Science*, increasingly unpopular in the South for its anti-slavery tenets. When the perturbations of the 1844 Methodist schism reached Wadsworth at his post-college pastorate in Norfolk, he opted for affiliation with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁹⁴⁰

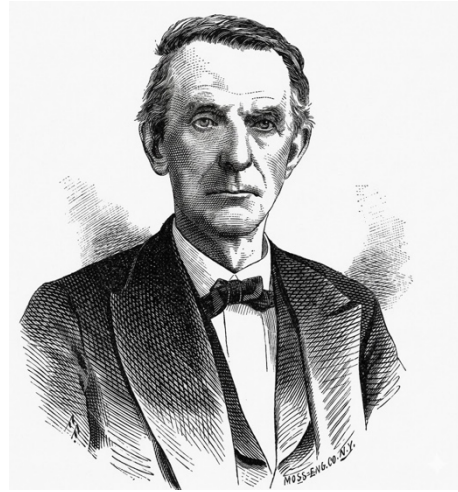


Figure 72. Rev. Edward Wadsworth

In the fall of 1846, he was appointed as the replacement for the departing Robert Paine, bishop, planter and slaveholder. He replaced Paine in both of his capacities, the presidency and the chair of moral philosophy. Wayland's text likely remained his teaching text at La Grange, though likely stirring the antagonisms of his pro-slavery students.⁹⁴¹ Arriving on campus, there is some evidence that his first hire was the aforementioned Burr Hamilton McCown to fill the languages chair vacated by Carlos Smith. There is an irony to the fact that his second hire of this former vice-president of the Virginia Temperance Society would be none other than

⁹⁴⁰ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 180; Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, p. 80.

⁹⁴¹ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 181.

McCown's replacement, N. A. Penland, whose life would end in a haze of alcohol in 1856.⁹⁴²

Wadsworth, who never seemed to embrace his roles at La Grange, arrived to find a college in turmoil. In August of 1847, Thomas Hobbs wrote of receiving a letter from his friend Presley Keyes still enrolled at the college. Keyes wrote of the sense of desperation on the mountain where the enrollment had sunk to fewer than 50 students, albeit relaying hope that the energetic replacement for the departed Henry Tutwiler, chemistry professor James Ward Hardy, would bring a new energy to campus. Certainly, the young Hardy made his presence felt. He was on the Methodist board that purchased the landmark Baptist church on the mountain, and in July 1852, he was licensed to preach on the Franklin Circuit.⁹⁴³

In the end, Keyes pessimism got the best of him; "I fear it will not flourish again soon," he lamented.⁹⁴⁴ In 1850, there were still only about 75 students, largely due to the smallpox raging in the area that year.⁹⁴⁵ With so little money coming in, bills were not being paid, and debt of more than \$5,000 confronted Wadsworth and the trustees, part of that including the unpaid compensation of the faculty themselves.⁹⁴⁶ To staunch the flow of red ink, Wadsworth initiated an aggressive program of scholarships. Perpetual scholarships sold for \$500; 8-year scholarships for \$300, and 4 year scholarships for \$150. In every case the purchaser would be able to

⁹⁴² Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 628; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 13; Vaughn, Gerald F. ["Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University."](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 180.

⁹⁴³ Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 49; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904.

⁹⁴⁴ Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [*The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 77.

⁹⁴⁵ Vaughn, Gerald F. ["Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University."](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 182.

⁹⁴⁶ Anson West. [*A History of Methodism in Alabama*](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 624.

choose the student recipient of the scholarship.⁹⁴⁷ Vaughn and others note a steady recovery under his leadership, stating that enrollment reached 225 in 1851, and instead of debt, the college could celebrate a \$50,000 endowment.⁹⁴⁸ Likely, the “endowment” was quickly consumed by incoming scholarship claimants and the payment of pressing debts. Certainly, his tenure attracted attention from counterparts in the South. In 1847, in his first year on the job, Emory and Henry, and Randolph-Macon awarded him honorary doctorates.⁹⁴⁹ In 1850, the charter of La Grange College was amended. Edward Wadsworth was named in the act as one of the board of trustees.⁹⁵⁰

Edward Wadsworth brought a stern new discipline into the classroom: the perspective of the textbook author was the law. As Rivers observed of his classroom style:

*He supposed that Wayland ... understood the work in hand. They were not to be contradicted. No pugnacious student was allowed to 'attack the author of his text-books. This was a new role. The students had been allowed to question many utterances of their text-books; and now they were forbidden to do this but were required to give a full analysis of the text and to stop at that. Their belligerent dispositions were restrained, and all differences of opinion were suppressed. This was irksome to many of the students who had been indulged in frequent attacks upon the doctrines taught in the textbooks.*⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴⁷ Harry V. Barnard. “La Grange College: A Historical Sketch.” *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. 12 (1988). Sheffield: Tennessee Valley Historical Society, p. 13.

⁹⁴⁸ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 182.

⁹⁴⁹ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 181.

⁹⁵⁰ Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama, Approved 14 January 1850: [No. 175.] [To amend an act entitled "An act to establish La Grange College."](#) The trustees were: Alexander Sale, Jack Shackelford, Maclen Sledge, John T. Abernathy, Stephen W. Harris, Fletcher C. Vinson, Dairy Mayes, Edward Wadsworth, Manoah B. Hampton, Tignal Jones, Francis W. Sykes, William W. Downes, Aswald King, Alexander L. P. Green, Davis Gurley, Edward A. O'Neal, Phileman King, Finch P. Scruggs, Edward B. Deloney, x John B. McFerrin, James W. Hardy, John B. Sale, Robert Paine, Jefferson Hamilton, William Hurrah, William Leigh, Frederick G. Ferguson. William McMahan, Francis A. Owen, John T. Baskerville, Samuel Watson, Joshua Soule, H. R. W. Hill, Gilbert D. Tayori, James E. Saunders and Robert H. Watkins. Any seven were declared to constitute a quorum for the purpose of business.

⁹⁵¹ Richard Henderson . [“Early Methodist Educators”](#). *Methodist Quarterly Review*. VIII, 2 (July 1890) New Series, pp. 230-232.

Even as the drift of sentiment among the students became more pro-slavery every year, in the moral philosophy classroom, President Wadsworth still gave voice to Wayland's mildly anti-slavery views.

There on the mountain, [Edward Wadsworth](#) lost his first wife, [Ann Eliza Felton](#) (1819 -1848), whom he had married while in Raleigh North Carolina in 1841. She died shortly after their arrival in 1848 and was buried in the La Grange cemetery. Their only infant child, Edward, had died in infancy in 1841. Two years after losing Ann, President Wadsworth married [Mary Winnifred Sledge](#) (1829 -1933), the daughter of Dr. Alexander Sledge and his wife Winnifred, who had 8 children. Edward and Mary would have no children, but she would live to a ripe old age, dying in Greensboro, Alabama in 1933 at the age of 103. As noted earlier, Edward's slave Jim Sledge may have been dowry of the marriage.

During his time on the mountain, the ascendant Methodists would purchase the La Grange brick church from the Baptists. In 1851, deacon Edmond Ellet transferred the building to Wadsworth and four other Methodist trustees. The Baptists used the \$460 for the construction of a church in Tuscumbia. The church was an active venue during the remaining years the college was one the mountain, often serving as a site for many college events. And after the college left for Florence, it served the institutions that persevered in its stead. The old church would even survive the devastation of the civil war years and the subsequent depopulation of the mountain.⁹⁵² As McGregor observed from the vantage point of 1904:

*This splendid structure is still the property of the Methodist church but is not used as a house of worship, the membership at La Grange not justifying an appointment. The building stands as a monument, without inscription, to the honesty of its builders and their skill in structure with an eye to acoustics, and is a silent informant to the living, and perhaps will be to generations yet unborn, that it was once a place where the people of La Grange and vicinity congregated to worship the true god.*⁹⁵³

⁹⁵² Rev. Josephus Shackelford. [History of the Muscle Shoals Baptist Association From 1820 to 1890, a Period of 70 Years. With a History of the Churches of the Same and a Biographical Sketch of its Ministers. Also a Short Sketch of the General Baptist History](#) by Rev. Matthew Lyon. Trinity AL: Published by the Author, 1891.

⁹⁵³ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904

Never comfortable in his demanding roles in the struggling college, in 1852 Wadsworth and his new wife left for the pastorate of the prestigious [McKendree Methodist Church](#) in Nashville, also teaching literature and belles-letters at the University of Nashville.⁹⁵⁴ While there, he offered to La Grange graduate John Wesley Maddin, then studying medicine at Nashville alongside his brother, the chair of Ancient Languages which he declined in order to concentrate on his medical studies.⁹⁵⁵ From there, he was transferred in 1855 to the Alabama Conference and the pastorate of the Methodist church in Greensboro, Alabama, where things took a further turn. The desire of the Alabama Conference for its own college was strong, and their interests inimical to the health of La Grange College whose primary sponsor was the Tennessee Conference.⁹⁵⁶

The impetus for the Alabama Conference to form a school of its own began at 1854 session of the conference in 1854 when Methodists in the region around Auburn presented a petition calling for a college in the Alabama Conference. Competition arose between Auburn and Greensboro, and at the 1855 conference in Eutaw, debate led to the choice of Greensboro, like La Grange a town without rail access. Bishop Robert Paine and pastor Edward Wadsworth were among the trustees appointed to direct the fortunes of the emergent Southern University. Paine reportedly donated 1,000 acres of farmland to help fund the University. Wadsworth preached in Greensboro and Selma while the buildings for the University were being constructed, returning in 1859 when the school opened as Professor of Moral Philosophy. He was joined on the faculty by one of his La Grange students, Oscar Casey, who left his faculty position at Florence Wesleyan University to become Professor of Ancient Languages.⁹⁵⁷ Wadsworth played a pivotal role in shaping the initial curriculum of the University, With his experience as La Grange President and professor at the

⁹⁵⁴ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 182.

⁹⁵⁵ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904; [Dr. J. W. Maddin Answers Summons,” The Tennessean, Nashville, May 5, 1908.](#)

⁹⁵⁶ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 182.

⁹⁵⁷ Christenberry, Daniel P. [The Semi-Centennial History of the Southern University, 1856 – 1906.](#) Greensboro: D. P. Christenberry, 1908, pp. 15-20, p. 26.

University of Nashville, he was tasked to lead the committee on curriculum and instruction. With his leadership, the report was ready in June 1857.⁹⁵⁸

Importantly, the trustees, including Paine, Wadsworth, and former University of Alabama English professor [Henry W. Hilliard](#), directed that the course of study way be directly supportive of the needs and values of the Southern elite. Wayland's textbook was deemed unsuitable to the purpose and was replaced in the curriculum by the work of yet another La Grange figure. Richard Henderson Rivers new text [Elements of Moral Philosophy](#) (1859) was adopted instead. Reflective of the widening chasm in the country, the trustees directed that the faculty select southern textbooks as they could and eliminate undesirable works. Rivers was President of the La Grange successor school, Florence Wesleyan University at the time of the book's publication, and stridently pro-slavery. The preface to his work declared: "It is the only work on moral philosophy which gives a full and correct view of the slavery question. It shows to the youth of the land that slavery is not a sin, that it was established originally by the Devine Being, for wise, just and benevolent purposes; that it was directly sanctioned by Christ and his apostles, and is not, therefore the sum of all evils."⁹⁵⁹ Going even further, Mercer University in 1860 instituted a formal course in slavery, encouraging student to enroll and "defend the institutions of their country."⁹⁶⁰

True to textbook as always, Wadsworth took the sentiments of Rivers to heart. By this time, he and Winnifred were themselves the owners of five slaves. And the senior Wadsworth took exception to sentiments among the Southern University faculty that did not adhere to board sentiments. [John Adam Reubelt](#), Southern professor of Hebrew and Modern Languages, was born in Germany, educated at the University of Berlin and emigrated to the United States in 1840. He taught in Pennsylvania and Missouri before finding his way to Selma and his role at

⁹⁵⁸ Vaughn, Gerald F. ["Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University."](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 184.

⁹⁵⁹ Vaughn, Gerald F. ["Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University."](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 184. Vaughn quotes ' preface of 1859 which is removed from subsequent editions.

⁹⁶⁰ Cohen, Michael David. [Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 23

Southern University. And there he quickly found himself on the wrong side of policy. University historian and former faculty member Christenberry notes that in Reubelt, Wadsworth “detected views in morals and religion not in harmony with that of the Church” forcing his resignation.⁹⁶¹ Indeed, Reubelt left the region, and was quoted in the *New York Times* (May 2, 1861), about his differences with the University, including his unwillingness to be drafted into the Confederate military.⁹⁶² Wadsworth would remain affiliated with Southern University through 1871, when he returned to pastoral work.

James Ward Hardy (1815 – 1853). With the abrupt departure of Edward Wadsworth in October 1852., the trustees turned inward to fill the leadership vacancy. Perhaps the decision reflected the fiscal duress of the college, and perhaps Hardy, well-regarded by the students, was asked to continue shouldering the responsibilities for chemistry and natural history he had inherited from Tutwiler.⁹⁶³ Present with him on the faculty was the fragile Presbyterian minister Nicholas A. Penland, professor of Greek and Latin. He and his wife were still coping with the loss of three children the year before and would soon leave for Texas.

When Penland departed, [Oscar Fitzaland Casey](#) (1825 – 1898) would pick up his Greek and Latin load and additionally teach mathematics. From Newberry, South Carolina, Casey had graduated from La Grange in 1849, earning both the B. A. and M. A. degrees and moving onto the faculty that year. In his time there, Casey taught both Ancient Languages and mathematics.⁹⁶⁴ Another 1849 graduate, Thomas Weir, was in charge of the Preparatory Department, and lent Casey a hand in language instruction. It was a chaotic time at the University, with funds short and futures in

⁹⁶¹ Christenberry, Daniel P. [The Semi-Centennial History of the Southern University, 1856 – 1906](#). Greensboro: D. P. Christenberry, 1908, p. 26; “[Lamda Chapter at Indiana Asbury: Initiates 1856 – 1870](#)”. By Tanner Blackstock, editor of Phi Gamma Delta Archives. Online. Accessed November 10, 2025; Flynt, J. Wayne. “Southern Higher Education and the Civil War.” *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), p. 214..

⁹⁶² “[State of Affairs in the South](#).” *The New York Times*. May 26, 1861, p. 2. Online. Accessed November 10, 2025.

⁹⁶³ Rogal, Samuel J. [A Biographical Sketchbook of Nineteenth Century Methodist Ministers, Preachers, Missionaries and Exhorters at Work in Great Britain, the Americas, and Other Parts of the World](#). Wilmore, Kentucky: First Fruits Press, 2023. Online. Accessed November 11, 2025; Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 49.

⁹⁶⁴ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 30.

doubt. The faculty became increasingly inbred and short-lived.⁹⁶⁵ Like many students, [Casey](#) was born in South Carolina, grandson of [Levi Casey](#), Revolutionary War hero and member of congress from that state. In 1858, he married [Frances Olivia Frazier](#) of Auburn, daughter of a wealthy slaveholder, [Addison Frazier](#). They would have six children.⁹⁶⁶ Casey would be one of the more enduring names among ever-changing faculty of a struggling La Grange, appearing again at Florence Wesleyan and Southern University. From there he moved to a faculty position at [Martin College](#) in Pulaski Tennessee, and subsequently to Montgomery where he conducted a private school. In final years were spent in Auburn where he opened another school, dying there in 1898.⁹⁶⁷

Taking over for the departed Edward Wadsworth as Chair in Mental and Moral philosophy was Smith W. Moore, who left the presidency of the Athens Female Institute for the post. [Septimus Rice](#), another La Grange graduate, assumed the professorship of pure mathematics, and Thomas R. Smith took over the preparatory department.⁹⁶⁸

Georgian James Hardy was a distinguished graduate of Randolph Macon and was said by Richard Henderson Rivers to have known Edward Wadsworth during their time at Randolph Macon. Hardy joined the faculty there in 1838 as Professor of Experimental Sciences. On the faculty with him was none other than Edward Dromgoole Sims, Professor of English and Oriental Languages. Hardy taught there for a number of years, largely during the tenure of [Landon Garland](#), future president of both the University of Alabama (1847-1865) and Vanderbilt.⁹⁶⁹

Old Jim” Hardy earned something of a reputation as a recluse in his third floor laboratories, aloof and unpopular as he pressed to stay abreast of the demands of his classes. In 1846-1847, tensions developed between

⁹⁶⁵ Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 60.

⁹⁶⁶ Vaughn, Gerald F, “[Allen S. Andrews, Oscar F. Casey, and the Rise and Fall of Southern University in the Late Nineteenth Century](#),” *Methodist history* Year: 2006, Volume: 45, Issue: 1, p. 56; Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, p. 86.

⁹⁶⁷ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 30.

⁹⁶⁸ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 14; *The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America*. Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 19.

⁹⁶⁹ Sellers, James Benson . [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 78-80.

President Garland and the faculty, attributable in large measure to the fiscal pressures upon the school. Those tensions were reported to have contributed to a measure of student disorder and insubordination. A number of faculty resigned as did President Garland. Garland moved to chair of mathematics at the University of Alabama, then as its president, on to Mississippi and then to the chancellorship of Vanderbilt University. James Ward Hardy remained for a while on the reorganized faculty as Professor of Experimental Science, Astronomy and Optics. However, shortly afterwards, at the trustee meeting, June 1847, he submitted his resignation and took his post at La Grange, replacing Henry Tutwiler.⁹⁷⁰

And as seen, Hardy did bring energy to the La Grange campus. He played, and prayed, with the young students, and the students welcomed his lectures and experiments. Shortly after his arrival, in May 1848, he was the featured speaker before the college's two literary societies.⁹⁷¹ In their fieldwork, Hardy provided his students with wagon and driver as they explored the terrain, harvesting fossils and other specimens from the fields and streams. Some of those collected found their way to the Smithsonian Institute. Perhaps from concepts he had encountered at Randolph Macon, and certainly in a bid to boost the campus income through fresh programming, he was part of the effort in 1852 to introduce a civil engineering program at La Grange, instruction based in part on practical observations of the railroad.⁹⁷²

But his time at La Grange was cut tragically short. In August 1853, James Hardy sought medical care for the extraction of an abscessed tooth, dying as a result. In the pre-antibiotic era, were a significant health risk, with fatality rates from infection running from ten to forty percent. The lack of sterile practice made the surgical act of extraction itself a high risk for infection transfer. Some of the sketchy accounts of his death attribute the cause to erysipelas, perhaps caused by a form of streptococcus infection leading to the appearance of the bacterial skin infection that was an accompanying symptom of the infection causing his death.⁹⁷³ Rivers recalls

⁹⁷⁰ Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, pp. 65 – 108.

⁹⁷¹ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 17.

⁹⁷² Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 49; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904.

⁹⁷³ Steen, Robert S. *The History of LaGrange College*. Privately published. Circa 2020, p. 49;

that his sudden passing created a panic. “Such a calamity had never before so suddenly fallen upon La Grange College. ‘President Hardee is dead’ seemed to sound like a death knell to the college.”⁹⁷⁴ He was buried in the La Grange Cemetery alongside the wives of Robert Paine and Edward Wadsworth. Fossils from the mountain collected by his students marked his grave.⁹⁷⁵

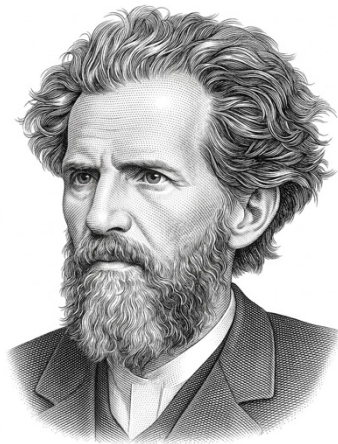


Figure 73 Smith W. Moore

Smith William Moore (1818 – 1880). Smith W. Moore, more of an administrator than a leader, was a background figure in Methodist higher education in the Tennessee Valley, serving useful supporting roles as the needs arose during his life. With the untimely death of James Hardy, the board looked inward to the faculty. Oscar Casey was 29, La Grange graduate Septimus Rice was 35 but limited in administrative experience, and the bereaved Penlands were preparing their move to Texas. And so, the board conferred the interim title of president upon Smith Moore, who had inherited Wadsworth’s chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy. During this period, the services of Rev. Thomas P. Hatch were obtained for the Chair of Chemistry and Geology, filling the vacuum created by the death of James Ward Hardy.⁹⁷⁶

Born in North Carolina, Moore was a member of the class of 1844 at Randolph-Macon but did not graduate. It was a distinguished class and included such notables as [William H. Cabell](#) of Virginia and future Methodist bishop [Holland Nimmons McTyeire](#). His college connections would serve Moore well during his life. It is likely he knew both Edward Wadsworth and James Hardy from their time at Randolph Macon. His experience as an educational administrator began at the Athens [Female Institute of the Tennessee Annual Conference](#), as it was chartered by the state of Alabama in 1842. Richard Henderson Rivers departed his professorship at La Grange to assume the presidency of the new school in 1843, remaining until 1847. Smith W. Moore became its third president in

⁹⁷⁴ , Richard Henderson. “[Early Methodist Educators](#),” *Methodist Quarterly Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (July 1890), p. 232.

⁹⁷⁵ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 7.

⁹⁷⁶ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 626.

1852.⁹⁷⁷ Atypically, he remained in that role only for the year before relocating to La Grange as a professor.

He arrived on the mountain in 1853 with his wife [Mary Odalia Yates Moore](#) (1820 – 1906) whom he had married in 1844 and their first born child, 8 year old [Warner](#). A second child, [Lily](#), would be born in 1853. Warner would join a Confederate artillery unit as a private, ending the war with the rank of corporal. He would serve the Methodist Church, South from 1868 until the end of his life. Lily would marry a prominent Tennessee physician and live out her life there.

Smith Moore's interim role as president lasted until January 1854 when Richard Henderson Rivers returned from his third post as president of Centenary College to assume the helm at La Grange. Because Rivers resumed the role of Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Moore was rendered superfluous, and he departed the school. The family moved to Mississippi, where he served as President of the Bascom Female Seminary from 1855 until 1859 also serving the church there as its minister.⁹⁷⁸ The seminary was named for one of the southern Methodist clergy prominent in the 1844 schism of the church. After the war, Moore could be found in Trenton, Tennessee where he assumed the presidency of Andrew College, named in honor of the namesake of the schism.⁹⁷⁹ From 1866 to 1870, he would serve both the college and the local church. In 1872, long after La Grange and its pre-war successors ceased to exist, Bishops Robert Paine and [Holland Nimmons McTyeire](#) would be driving forces in securing a charter for Vanderbilt University and ensuring a leading role for the Methodist Church, South in its future. Six conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church South committed to support the new university. Smith W. Moore was among those selected from the Memphis Conference, and

⁹⁷⁷ "[Moore, Smith William](#)." Marshall Digital Scholar, Marshall University. Online. Accessed November 13, 2025; Irby, Richard. [History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia](#). Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, n.d. Internet Archive. Kindle Book download, pp. 80-84; "[History of Athens College, Limestone County, Alabama](#)." Alabama Genealogy Trails. Online. Accessed November 13, 2025.

⁹⁷⁸ [Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1857 – 1858](#). Nashville: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1858, p. 759; Hathorn, J. C. *History of Grenada County*. Chapter 4: "[Early Educational Development in Grenada and Vicinity](#)". Privately published 1970. Online. **Mississippi GenWeb (msgw.org)** Accessed November 14, 2025.

⁹⁷⁹ "[Andrew College, Trenton, Gibson County, Tennessee](#)." *Our Family Tree*. Online. Accessed November 14, 2025.

A. L. P. Green joined him from the Tennessee Conference.⁹⁸⁰ Smith Moore would remain active in the Memphis Conference until his death in 1880.⁹⁸¹

Richard Henderson Rivers (1814 - 1894) . Richard Rivers was born in 1814 to first generation Tennessee farmers [Edmund](#) and [Sarah “Sallie” Henderson](#) in Montgomery County. Wealthy farmers and horse breeders, they were able to afford to send their son to college. Caught in the religious awakening on the frontier, Rivers first elected to pursue ministry, achieving ordination at the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church in 1833. As had Robert Paine before him he arduously labored to serve a large circuit in Alabama for two years.⁹⁸² His circuit extended over three hundred miles, which he labored to cover in its entirety once a month. For his devotion, the Methodist church awarded him a horse, one suit of clothes, and \$36 for sustenance for the year. The life of the itinerant minister was arduous and poor.⁹⁸³

Attending his first conference, in Pulaski, Tennessee, as an itinerant minister in 1833, Rivers met Robert Paine. Paine was serving as chair of the examination committee of young ministers. There he sought the President’s advice on his matriculation, as a college education was something his father earnestly sought for him. Paine advised him to come to La Grange for counsel. After a rugged five day trip traversing 150 miles, requiring him to walk on foot through mud and water for ten miles, the disheveled young minister arrived at Paine’s home on the mountain.

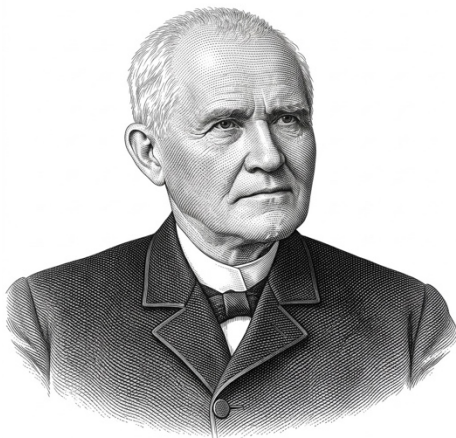


Figure 74 Richard Henderson Rivers

⁹⁸⁰ Merriam, Lucius Salisbury. [Higher Education in Tennessee](#). No. 16. U. S. Bureau of Education. Circular of Information No. 5. Contributions to American Educational History, Herbert B. Adams, ed. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893, p. 112- 113. The North Alabama, Alabama, Mississippi, and elected to take no action in support of Vanderbilt and their seats on the Board were declared vacant.

⁹⁸¹ “Mrs. Mary O. Moore Dead.” Obituary. Newspaper clipping (unattributed) attached to “[Mary Odalia Yates Moore](#),” *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed November 16, 2025

⁹⁸² Holifield, E. Brooks. “, Richard Henderson.” *American National Biography*. Online Edition. UT Libraries. ANB Online. Kindle Book download; Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson* . Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 3. Library. Archives.

⁹⁸³ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 51

He describes his first observations on the mountain, impressions that would remain with him through his own career:

The boys were scattered over the campus. They were in high glee, as the exercises were just closed, and for a time they were free. They did not meet my ideal of college students. They made the campus ring with their shouts. The President turned to me and said: "Boys will be boys; we do not expect them to be saints." I have been reminded a thousand times of this utterance. It illustrated his sympathy with boyhood. It showed his knowledge of human nature. It gave me an insight into his management of his boys and revealed to some extent the secret of his power over them. He did not attempt impossibilities. He did not interfere with the innocent hilarity of youth. At the right time he delighted in innocent mirth. His religion never assumed the form of sour godliness.⁹⁸⁴

Entering the college that year, he graduated with honors in 1835, completing the four-year course of study in 18 months while teaching a class in Greek.⁹⁸⁵ His brother [Thomas Rivers](#) (1819 – 1863) also graduated from La Grange. Admitted to the bar after graduation, Thomas practiced law in Somerville, Tennessee, serving for many years in the Tennessee militia, where he attained the rank of brigadier general. He also served one term in Congress (1855 – 57) but did not seek re-election. He died at 43 years of age in Somerville.⁹⁸⁶ As seen, Rivers taught ancient languages at La Grange College 1835 – 1943, when he left the school for the Athens Female Institute shortly after the ownership of the school was transferred in 1842 to the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church.⁹⁸⁷ He was regarded

⁹⁸⁴ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 44.

⁹⁸⁵ Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson*. Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 5. University of North Alabama. Library. Archives.

⁹⁸⁶ "[Rivers, Thomas](#)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Online edition. Accessed November 17, 2025; Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson Rivers*. Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 9. Library. Archives.

⁹⁸⁷ "[Athens State University](#)" Online Website. Accessed November 17, 2025

as an effective administrator there, and an early advocate of an equal education for women. Rivers Hall on the campus is named in his honor.⁹⁸⁸

Rivers left Athens for Centenary College, Louisiana, in 1849, replacing the prominent [Augustus Baldwin Longstreet](#) who had accepted the presidency of the University of Mississippi.⁹⁸⁹ Indeed, the antebellum Southern Methodist landscape was shaped by a remarkably mobile cadre of ministers whose careers crossed state lines and denominational jurisdictions. The intersection of Longstreet and Rivers at Centenary stands out for the clarity with which their careers reveal the ideological, institutional, and moral contours of the time. Their respective ideas and commitments framed the educational world that stretched from the Tennessee Valley to the Gulf South.

Longstreet's sequence of presidencies—Emory College (1839-1848), Centenary College (1848-1849), University of Mississippi (1849-1856) and South Carolina College (1857-1861) gave him unusually broad exposure to the culture of Southern higher education. By the time of his tenure at Mississippi and South Carolina he had become a polemicist for Southern rights and an outspoken advocate of secession and, if necessary, war. Long before 1860, Longstreet argued the South's political and cultural institutions required separation from the Union. His courtroom background, fiery temperament (he announced his resignation from Centenary at commencement), and experiences with unruly students shaped both his public rhetoric and the satirical portraits of the planter students found in his satire [Master William Mitten](#).⁹⁹⁰

Rivers, by contrast, emerged from the theological and educational wing of the Southern Methodist tradition. His presidency of Athens Female College and his earlier work at La Grange established him as a leading Methodist educator in the Tennessee Valley. Rivers possessed a systematic and philosophically oriented mind, qualities that culminated in his widely

⁹⁸⁸ Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson*. Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 10. Library. Archives; Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 51.

⁹⁸⁹ Morgan, Lee. [Centenary College of Louisiana, 1825 – 2000: The Biography of an American University](#). Shreveport: Centenary College of Louisiana Press, 2008, p. 31.

⁹⁹⁰ Romine, Scott. "[Longstreet, Augustus Baldwin](#)". *American National Biography*. Online. Published February 2000. UT Libraries. *American National Biography*. Accessed November 18, 2025; Longstreet Augustus B. [Master William Mitten or, A Youth of Brilliant Talents Who Was Ruined by Bad Luck](#). Macon, GA: Burke and Co., 1889. Internet Archive.,

used textbook, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, published in 1859.⁹⁹¹ In that treatise, Rivers advanced a biblically anchored defense of slavery, arguing that Providence sanctioned the subordination of an inferior race. Rivers' formulation, couched in the language of ethics and Christian duty represented one of the more earnest theological rationalizations for slavery within the Southern Methodist intellectual world. Together with Longstreet's political secessionism, Rivers' moral philosophy reveals the pervasive ideological commitments that undergirded the region's educational institutions.⁹⁹²

Intersecting at Centenary, the careers of Longstreet and Rivers define the moral geography of antebellum Southern Methodist education. Longstreet's humor, legal acumen, and political militancy reflected the public sphere of the planter South. Rivers' philosophical defense of social hierarchy reflected the theological and institutional sphere that shaped the curriculum and moral expectations of the colleges. Their administrative succession—bridging Emory, Centenary, Mississippi, Georgia, and La Grange—illustrates how Methodist educators carried ideas, assumptions, and cultural norms across a wide interconnected landscape.⁹⁹³ Together, they reveal a system in education, denominational identity and pro-slavery ideology were not separate domains but mutually reinforcing components of the antebellum intellectual life.⁹⁹⁴

The records of Centenary are more complete than La Grange or its successors and demonstrate more clearly the challenges of administering a weakly funded church school on the frontier. Rivers' time at the college

⁹⁹¹ , Richard Henderson. [*Elements of Moral Philosophy*](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859.

⁹⁹² Genovese, Eugene, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, [*The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview*](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. Internet Archive. Limited access; Brophy, Alfred L. "[The World Made by Laws and the Laws Made by the World of the Old South](#)." *Signposts: New Directions in Southern Legal History*. 2013; Mitchell Snay. [*Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993. Internet Archive. Limited access.

⁹⁹³ Lawrence, Brian D. [*The Relationship Between the Methodist Church, Slavery and Politics, 1784-1844*](#). Ph D. Dissertation. Rowan University, 2018. Rowan University Digital Works; Norwood, John Nelson. [*The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics*](#). Alfred N.Y.: The Alfred Press, Alfred University, 1923. Internet Archive; Carwardine, Richard. "[Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War](#)," *Church History* Vol. 69, NO. 3 (September 2000) pp.578 - 609.

⁹⁹⁴ Goen, C. C. [*Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War*](#). Mercer: Mercer University Press, 1985. Internet Archive. 14-day loan available.

merits a closer look. His arrival was certainly a rocky one. Longstreet's abrupt departure had been problematic and the board's presence in governance loomed large. A young faculty member who arrived contemporaneously with Rivers soon fell victim to allegations of drinking with the students, attending horse races, and harboring theological heresies that the horrified Methodists likened to "Unitarianism". Investigated and excoriated, faculty member Daniel Martindale survived the charges of horse racing and alcohol but was condemned for his religious views. The board moved to declare his chair of natural sciences vacant, but the motion failed to carry. Rivers, as president, supported him even recommending a raise. But the issues did not go away until he voluntarily resigned and departed at the end of the 1851 class year. The imbroglio did spark the establishment of a board committee at Centenary to investigate the character and orthodoxy of all the faculty.⁹⁹⁵

In that same first year, one of the main college buildings burned to the ground, apparently caused by a flue conflagration in a common room. An earlier board action to secure insurance for campus buildings and equipment had not been acted upon. It appears that the library and the scientific apparatus survived, perhaps having been located elsewhere earlier. Nevertheless, the loss added to the financial pressures Centenary already faced and Rivers pressed the board to move forward with construction of a replacement building, a project accomplished during the tenure of the next president.⁹⁹⁶

During Rivers' tenure, Centenary tuition in 1852-53 for a ten session was \$50, the same charge that was in place at La Grange. Room rent in the dormitory was \$30 per session, with fuel and cleaning services costing another \$30. Students were responsible for furnishing their dorm rooms and for providing their own candles and oil lamps—"lights" in the parlance of the times. On balance, he left the school in stable condition. Enrollment upon his departure was 260, an historical high. Like most colleges operating in the classical tradition, its catalog at the time of his departure both affirmed a long-standing liberal arts tradition while acknowledging a responsibility to practically prepare the students for the workaday world.

⁹⁹⁵ Morgan, Lee. [*Centenary College of Louisiana, 1825 – 2000: The Biography of an American University*](#). Shreveport: Centenary College of Louisiana Press, 2008, pp. 32-34.

⁹⁹⁶ Morgan, Lee. [*Centenary College of Louisiana, 1825 – 2000: The Biography of an American University*](#). Shreveport: Centenary College of Louisiana Press, 2008, p. 35

The failing health of his wife, [Martha](#) (1818-1897), whom he had married in 1836, induced him to leave Centenary in 1854, responding to the call of the Tennessee Conference and trustees, still coping with the sudden death of James Ward Hardy.⁹⁹⁷ La Grange had fallen into debt and disrepair, and the board looked to Rivers as its savior.⁹⁹⁸

Returning to the mountain with “Mattie” and four children⁹⁹⁹ in early 1854, President Rivers found the college reeling, in dire need of financial infusion to remain afloat. The financial difficulties that lingered after the Panic of 1837; the deeply discounted scholarships of the Wadsworth tenure; smallpox, cholera and other epidemics sweeping the South; the rise of competing colleges in the region; and the sheer isolation of La Grange all played a role in La Grange’s predicament. In the grim narrative of Anson West:

*The body of students was small, the college buildings were dilapidated, and a long standing debt was hanging over the Institution. Little more than six and a half months had intervened from the death of the lamented Hardy, and everything had assumed a gloomy hue. If the buildings could be repaired, the debt liquidated, the endowment enlarged, and the patronage extended, the College might be perpetuated and advanced to greater usefulness, otherwise the days of its glory were already ended.*¹⁰⁰⁰

Departure from the Mountain.

⁹⁹⁷ Morgan, Lee. [Centenary College of Louisiana, 1825 – 2000: The Biography of an American University](#). Shreveport: Centenary College of Louisiana Press, 2008, p. 34; Holifield, E. Brooks; Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 52. “, Richard Henderson.” *American National Biography*. Online Edition. UT Libraries. ANB Online, 2000; Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 51.

⁹⁹⁸ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 167. West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 168.

⁹⁹⁹ “[Rev. Richard Henderson](#)”. *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed November 22, 2025. The family lost three children during their years at Centenary: Ellen, Thomas and Ameilia. The four surviving children were Sarah, William, Benjamin and Lizzie. Another son, Richard, was born in 1854, but lived only three years; Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson*. Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933. Dr. A. L. Crabb, Instructor. University of North Alabama, p. 8. Library. Archives. Of their nine children. Only three would survive their father’s passing.

¹⁰⁰⁰ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, 628; Christenberry, Daniel P. [The Semi-Centennial History of Southern University, 1856-1906](#) Greensboro, AL: D. P. Christenberry, Publisher, 1908, P. 15.

Even before arriving, Rivers set in the spring of 1854 a goal of a \$100,000 endowment, payment of outstanding debt, as well as library and scientific apparatus enhancement. He and the board returned to the scholarship Ponzi scheme. A quota of 750 scholarships, good for twenty years, and discounted to \$100 was set, none of the scholarships to be valid unless the quota was met. The agents were sent crawling through their respective conferences to raise money and sell the scholarships. President Rivers offered a twenty-year scholarship to all agents who sold twenty-five of them. By August, he and the board had to admit defeat; the plan failed. A consequent appeal to the Methodist constituency for 1,000 supporters to contribute ten dollars also fell flat. Outlook grew dimmer.¹⁰⁰¹

Almost upon arrival, President Rivers found opportunity in desperation. On September 11, 1854, [William Basil Wood](#), [George Washington Foster](#), and [Edward O'Neal](#) presented a petition to the Florence city council to accept the relocation of La Grange College to Florence.¹⁰⁰² The Tennessee Methodist Conference met in Florence that year, only the second time the modest village had hosted the event. There, city leaders made the proposal to move the college to Florence. The offer from the leaders was to pay all existing debt, provide La Grange College with new, superior, buildings, to create a \$40,000 endowment, and guarantee a local patronage greater than the total enrollment on the mountain.¹⁰⁰³ [A.L.P. Green](#), immediately embraced the opportunity on behalf of the Tennessee Conference and offered a resolution to accept the offer. The conference approved the motion, and the Alabama and Mississippi Conferences gave their approval shortly afterwards.¹⁰⁰⁴

Florence was an improvement over the secluded and hard to reach campus on Lawrence's Hill. Though small, the 1857 local census established the population of Florence as 1,444. There were reckoned to be 50 mercantile establishments in the town along with 9 lawyers, 4

¹⁰⁰¹ Posey, Walter B. "[La Grange: Alabama's Earliest College](#)," *Birmingham Southern College Bulletin*, XXVI (November 1933), p. 22.

¹⁰⁰² Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama](#): (with 1850 census of Lauderdale County). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰³ , Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 121.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 53.

physicians, and two dentists.¹⁰⁰⁵ There were even the first signs of industrialization. Textile mills were operating strongly before the war, the Globe Factory producing 80,000 yards of cloth weekly on its looms. Eight hundred people were working in the three mills owned by [James Martin](#) (1798-1869) and his partners. Whites, not slaves, appear to be the workers in the mills.¹⁰⁰⁶ Anson West added his own observation about the inevitability of the move from mountain to town:

*Towering mountains, rising hills, outlying valleys, meandering rivers, and skirting forests do not guarantee the permanent success of a college. To reject the populous and enterprising place, where thoroughfares converge, and select the inaccessible and insignificant place is to throw away possibilities and advantages without any compensation. The school to be large, self-supporting, and permanent must be in the midst of thrifty enterprises, and accessible to a numerous population. The larger the field, the brighter the prospect, the grander the opportunity. Temptations to vice will ever be found by the vicious, whether in the city full or the country waste. The sequestered spot is not the place for a large school. In monastic institutions licentiousness in its worst forms has held sway, and vice in its worst features has prevailed.*¹⁰⁰⁷

In January 1855, the Methodist college that was La Grange loaded a caravan of wagons bound for Florence, and janitor Jim Sledge closed its doors forever. The fifteen mile trip took three days, with multiple circuitous trips by wagons, buggies, and carts.¹⁰⁰⁸ A slave, Sledge, remained on the mountain and assumed a like role for the two successor institutions that would linger in succession until the Civil War. Sledge served those schools until 1858.¹⁰⁰⁹ In the carriages bound for Florence were President and Professor of Moral Philosophy and Belle Lettres, Richard Henderson Rivers, [Septimus Primus Rice](#), Rev. Bennett B. Ross, Rev. Thomas P. Hatch, and

¹⁰⁰⁵ Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 25; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰⁶ “[James Martin and His Cotton Mills](#)”. Florence-Lauderdale Public Library Digital Archive. Accessed November 21, 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁷ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p.432.

¹⁰⁰⁸ W. L. McDonald. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰⁹ McGregor, A. A. [History of LaGrange College](#) 1904, p. 37.

Oscar Fitzland Casey. Edwin Goodwin and Thomas R. Smith, head of the preparatory unit, chose to remain on the mountain, as they, the dissenting members of the Board of Trustees and a handful of students pondered their future.¹⁰¹⁰ Rice was Professor of Pure Mathematics; Ross taught Mixed Mathematics, and Casey shouldered the role of Ancient Languages, although he was also proficient in mathematics himself. Hatch, a Vermonter and accomplished botanist, assumed the Chair of Chemistry and Geology in 1853, dying in service to the school in 1855.¹⁰¹¹ Norman F. Briggs was one of the students on the wagon train to Florence. From the time of the move, he served as an assistant to Septimus Rice in the preparatory department, graduating in 1856. With the untimely demise of Hatch, Briggs assumed the Chair of Chemistry, Geology, and Mineralogy. Norman Briggs' career would end abruptly at the first battle of Manassas.¹⁰¹²

Oscar Casey's career is described above, and Septimus Rice's contributions to education in the Tennessee Valley will be described later. [Bennett Battle Ross](#) (1828-1878) was another graduate of La Grange, finishing with high honors in 1847. Subsequently he taught at a private school near Hartwell King's plantation. He obtained his license as a Methodist minister in 1851 and moved onto the La Grange faculty during the tumultuous 1853 period. Ross would teach but a year at Florence Wesleyan, later serving churches in Talladega, Tuskegee, and Huntsville, among others, before moving to [Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama](#) where he taught English Literature from 1872-1878.¹⁰¹³ His son, [Bennet Battle Ross II](#) (1864-1930) became a leader in Alabama higher education, teaching chemistry at Auburn, serving as dean, acting president

¹⁰¹⁰ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 53; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 37; W. L. McDonald. *Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*. Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁰¹¹ Webb, David H., Baskin, Jerry M. and Baskin Carol C. "Distribution and Status of *Astragalus Tennesseensis* (Fabaceae) In Alabama". *SIDA, Contributions to Botany*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (September 1992), pp. 97-103. It is not clear how Hatch was recruited to La Grange or how he got to the region. He may be related to New Yorker [Percival Mark Hatch](#) who died in Greensboro, Alabama in 1865.

¹⁰¹² W. L. McDonald. *Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*. Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 19-202; Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, pp. 60-61.

¹⁰¹³ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 30, 49.

and later as State Chemist. The chemistry building at Auburn was named in his honor in 1930.¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹⁴ Joel C. DuBose Ed. [*Notable Men of Alabama: Personal and Genealogical, with Portraits.*](#) Atlanta GA: Southern Historical Association, 1904, pp. 194-195; Skinner, W. W. "[Bennett Battle Ross.](#)" *Journal of Association of Official Agricultural Chemists*, Volume 13, Issue 3, 15 August 1930, Pages iii–iv.

Chapter 9

Florence Wesleyan University, 1855 – 1872

The founding of Florence Wesleyan University marked the end of one institutional life and the beginning of another. For a quarter of a century, La Grange College had clung to the summit of Lawrence Mountain, a vantage point rich with symbolism but increasingly ill-suited to the economic and demographic realities of the Tennessee Valley in the 1850s. By mid-decade, the pressures became impossible to ignore. The region's cotton economy was faltering under soil exhaustion and shifting market structures. New opportunities in Texas sapped resources and strength. In 1854, a train of 100 wagons left Leighton for Waco, bearing the William Downs family, perhaps the Penlands, and many others—a hemorrhaging of the very constituency the college depended upon.¹⁰¹⁵

The rise of other Methodist universities made it clear that a united church supportive of La Grange had been rendered unsustainable. The Methodist conferences knew that the college could not survive without relocating to a site that offered both population growth and transportation connectivity. Florence, situated at the convergence of river traffic and the rising Memphis & Charleston Railroad, provided an attractive solution. The calculations of the trustees, the Methodist conferences, President Rivers and the city fathers in Florence established a target size for La Grange in its new location of 150 enrollees or more, with the local patronage to comfortably provide half of that. It was a bold projection, but one grounded in the conviction that only a town with commercial energy could sustain a college in an age no longer dominated by isolated academies.¹⁰¹⁶

Yet the move to Florence also required abandoning something precious: the name La Grange. Initially there was an attempt to preserve the college name along with the patronage of the Methodist Church. The

¹⁰¹⁵ "[William Woods Downs \(1802-1882\)](#)," *Wiki Tree*. Online. Accessed November 30, 2025

¹⁰¹⁶ Deems, Charles F., ed. [Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855](#). New York: J. A. Gray's Fireproof Printing Office, 1856, p. 156.

minutes of the Tennessee Conference in October 1855 still invoked the name of “La Grange College, at Florence;” but that was the last time the nomenclature was used.¹⁰¹⁷ The former trustees in the Courtland, Leighton area strongly resisted the use of that name in Florence, and prevailed upon the legislature and Governor John Anthony Winston, himself a graduate of the old college, not to disallow the transfer of the name. The General Assembly required a new charter and a new name. Initially, the governor was not supportive, vetoing the legislation. Finally on February 14, 1856, the legislature passed the Act over the governor’s veto, and Florence Wesleyan University, with a governing board of 38 trustees came into being.¹⁰¹⁸ Until that time, the new school in Florence, and the vestigial remnants of college on Lawrence’s Mountain both claimed the charter and the name La Grange.¹⁰¹⁹



Figure 75. John Anthony Winston

John Anthony Winston (1812-1871), plantation slaveholder from Madison County, was a two-time governor of Alabama, elected in 1853 and 1855. He served three terms in the House and had been President of the Senate. The most significant act during his governorship was the enactment of the [Education Act of 1854](#), based on the early successes of the Mobile school system, an Act sponsored by [Alexander Beaufort Meek](#). Allowing counties to levy taxes for educational purposes and creating a state superintendent of education, the foundation was laid to provide the educated yeomanry heretofore lacking, a vacuum that had inhibited the ability of the few colleges in the state to fill their ranks with qualified learners. The program would start slowly over the remainder of the decade and would be sidelined by the catastrophic war years. But the base that it laid created the reason and

¹⁰¹⁷ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 629.

¹⁰¹⁸ Anson West. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 629; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 16.

¹⁰¹⁹ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015p. 8.

the means for the resurrection of Florence Wesleyan in another guise in the post-war years.¹⁰²⁰ Winston earned a reputation as Alabama's "veto Governor," and it is unlikely his actions against Florence Wesleyan University reflected animus regarding its departure from the mountaintop from where he graduated. For in that period, he vetoed and suffered the override of six other educational charters: The Medical College at Mobile; Florence Synodical Female College; Chunenugge Female College, Macon; Southern University, at Greensborough; and the East Alabama Male College, at Auburn.¹⁰²¹

The trustees initially marketed the old name. In a February 9, while the above legislation was pending, a notice in the *Southern Christian Advocate* announced the opening of the new session of "La Grange, at Florence," would occur on February 21. A circular, said the *Advocate*, was received "from the commissioners of the transferred college" filled with information about the transformation. The commissioners had been able to obtain from patrons in Florence, attractive facilities for the recitation rooms, the literary societies and chapel. Suggesting some things may have been left behind on the mountain, the circular emphasized that the school was in process of "obtaining the finest (scientific) apparatus manufactured in the United States". Moreover, it was stressed, "the entire Faculty" (a slight exaggeration) from the former campus would be on hand when the session opened.¹⁰²² The commissioners¹⁰²³ revisited the constraints that

¹⁰²⁰ Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913. Webb, Samuel L. and Margaret Ambrester, eds. [Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001

¹⁰²¹ Stephen B. Weeks. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913, p. 23.

¹⁰²² Deems, Charles F., ed. [Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855](#). New York: J. A. Gray's Fireproof Printing Office, 1856, p. 156. The faculty "on hand" were Rev. Richard Henderson, President and Professor of Moral and Mental Philosophy; [Oscar Fitzaland Casey](#), Professor of Ancient Languages; [Bennett Battle Ross](#), Professor of Mixed Mathematics, Thomas P. Hatch, Professor of Natural Science; and [Septimus Primus Rice](#), Pure Mathematics and Principal of the Preparatory Department, assisted by Normal F. Briggs. "La Grange College at Florence, Alabama," *Florence Gazette*, n.d. Copy obtained from University of North Alabama Library Special Collections, December 1, 2025. The scientific instruments were said to have been ordered from Philadelphia and Boston.

¹⁰²³ The "undersigned" commissioners were [Sidney Cherry Posey](#), Chairman, [George Washington Foster](#), [James Edmonds Saunders](#), [Wiley Turner Hawkins](#), John S. Kennedy, [Thomas Jefferson Foster](#) and [William Basil Wood](#). "La Grange College at Florence, Alabama," *Florence Gazette*,

forced the relocation, lamenting “the exceedingly dilapidated condition of the buildings, the embarrassment from debt and the want of local patronage.” Underscoring the lessons of deferred maintenance that have plagued all campuses past and present, the notice also communicated the move away from expensive dormitories and mess halls. Those former fixtures were now associated with negative moral undertones, a “mistaken policy,” that would be replaced by room and board among “the most respectable families” and patrons of the university, ensuring the “fostering care of the social family circle.”¹⁰²⁴ The costs to the student for room and board were projected to be approximately the same as in a dormitory environment: \$10 a month for board, and an additional \$2 for lodging, room rent and fuel. The arrangement, the commissioners promised, would provide moral supervision, social refinement, and an atmosphere free from the temptations that plagued unsupervised campus living.¹⁰²⁵ The new university remained under the purview of the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church, with the Memphis and Alabama Conferences as co-sponsors.¹⁰²⁶

The Players.

Relocation of a university, even at the modest scale of La Grange, is not a simple undertaking. Faculty, students, legislators, city leaders, and townspeople were all tasked to make the transition a successful one. The symbolic geography of Methodist higher education had shifted from the isolated ridge of Lawrence to the bustling frontier town on the Tennessee River.

The Board of Trustees called upon to lead Florence Wesleyan was 38 in number and empowered by the act to elect their own officers, with the authority to appoint and removed faculty, fix their salaries and define their duties. Taken together, the trustees constituted a cross-section of the Tennessee Valley’s antebellum elite – a carefully balanced coalition of

n.d. Copy obtained from University of North Alabama Library Special Collections, December 1, 2025.

¹⁰²⁴ Deems, Charles F., ed. [*Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855*](#). New York: J. A. Gray’s Fireproof Printing Office, 1856, p. 156.

¹⁰²⁵ “La Grange College at Florence, Alabama,” *Florence Gazette*, n.d. Copy obtained from University of North Alabama Library Special Collections, December 1, 2025.

¹⁰²⁶ “Act for the incorporation of the Florence Wesleyan University,” 1855, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama*, Twenty-third Biennial Session (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Steam Press, 1856), 61–63. Initially vetoed by the Governor and overridden by the Legislature.

planters, industrialists, jurists, politicians, merchants and Methodist theologians whose collective power defined the region's economy and its worldview. The following citizens comprised the board: Alexander L. P. Green, Samuel D. Weakley, John Edmund Moore, Richard Wilde Walker, Dr. James W. Stewart, Thomas Kirkman, Henry D. Smith, Edward A. O'Neal, Sidney C. Posey, Wiley T. Hawkins, James E. Saunders, William B. Wood, George Washington Foster, Thomas J. Foster, John S. Kennedy, Daniel Coleman, Robert A. Baker, William Dickson, Robert M. Patton, Richard H. Reeves, Oscar F. Casey, Robert Paine, John B. McFerrin, John W. Hanner, Thomas H. Hobbs, John T. Baskerville, Thomas Boswell, E. R. Flewellen, Jefferson Hamilton, Thomas O. Summer, Benajmin W. Maclin, Edgar M. Swoope, M. M. Henkle, David Clopton, Phineas T. Scruggs, John W. Rutland, Henry C. Jones, and Toliver Towles.¹⁰²⁷ Their presence on the board reveals not only who controlled higher education in Alabama but also what intellectual and social purposes the new university was expected to serve.

The Planter-Industrial-Mercantile Oligarchy

At the apex of the coalition stood [George Washington Foster](#) (1805-1878), a wealthy planter and industrialist, who was elected President of the



Figure 76. George Washington Foster

Board. In Lauderdale County alone he farmed 6,000 acres and owned at least 100 enslaved people. His marriage to [Sarah Independence Watkins](#), daughter of a wealthy Lawrence County planter, [Robert H. Watkins](#), melded two large fortunes. Their large estate, [Courtview](#), still stands as Rogers Hall on the campus of Florence Wesleyan's successor institution, the University of North Alabama. It was, wrote the impressionable young faculty member George Peek to his sister, "the finest residence in Florence," with a graveled walk in the shape of a heart surrounded by flower beds that came to a

¹⁰²⁷ *Act for the incorporation of the Florence Wesleyan University," 1855, Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama, Twenty-third Biennial Session (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Steam Press, 1856), 61–63. Initially vetoed by the Governor and overridden by the Legislature.*

point at the front entry.¹⁰²⁸ Foster and his two brothers, [Thomas Jefferson](#) (1806-1878) and [Benjamin Franklin](#) (1803-1887), owned cotton mills and woolen factories in the area before the Civil War. Marrying well, Thomas Jefferson Foster wed Sarah Foster's younger sister, [Virginia](#). Thomas was also named a trustee of Florence Wesleyan. George's \$10,000 donation was a key factor in bringing the college to the city. One source notes his gift covered more than one-third of the cost of constructing Wesleyan Hall, the first and the signature building of the campus; another suggests the money was used to endow a Professorship of Mathematics, to be known as the Foster Professorship. Altogether, five of the trustees are on record as making significant gifts to the school, with Dickson, Weakley, Kennedy and Stewart also stepping forward.¹⁰²⁹ The Foster family symbolized the fusion of plantation wealth and industrial capitalism that increasingly characterized the Shoals.

The Vice President of the Board was the wealthy merchant, [Thomas Kirkman](#) (1800-1864). His holdings were extensive, including a plantation in Mississippi and an iron furnace in Tennessee. Especially interesting were the familial ties to the famous horse breeder and planter [James Jackson](#) (1782-1840), owner of the Forks of Cypress mansion. Upon the death of Jackson in 1840, Kirkman, married to Jackson's stepdaughter [Elizabeth McCulloch](#), inherited the [Forks of Cypress](#). In counterpoint to the religious awakening sweeping the region, over three decades some of the most important race horses in the country were owned by the Forts of Cypress, including Jackson's Leviathan and Glencoe, and Kirkman's [Peytona](#), winner famous race against [Fashion](#) before a 100,000 spectators at the Union Course, Long Island, New York in 1845 – dubbed the “Race of the Century.”¹⁰³⁰ He was also an author, publishing acclaimed pieces such as “[A](#)

¹⁰²⁸ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, December 14, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹⁰²⁹ “[Courtview and the Foster Family](#).” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 1, 2025; Deems, Charles F., ed. [Annals of Southern Methodism for 1856](#). Nashville, TN: Stevenson & Owen. 1857, p. 125.

¹⁰³⁰ “[Peytona and Fashion's Great Match](#).” Smithsonian Institute. American History Museum website. Accessed December 2, 2025; O'Neal, Lizzie Kirkman. [Legend of Muscle Shoals and the Story of Florence](#), no publisher, (1916?), pp. 5-6. Here the spouse of Governor Emmett O'Neal paints a colorful picture of Peytona and the other Forks of Cypress horses. (A celebratory depiction of that race may be found at the [Smithsonian](#).)

[Quarter Race in Kentucky](#)”¹⁰³¹ These accomplishments underscored his national reach.

[George Washington Karsner](#) (1828-1914), a Florence merchant, served as Treasurer of the board. His father Benjamin (1800 – 1897) was a prominent figure in Florence, serving as a Justice of the Peace and Tax Assessor. The Karsner [home](#) on Pine Street is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. He was representative of the mercantile class whose investments in rail, river trade and urban infrastructure helped make the relocated college viable. George Karsner enlisted as a private in the 4th Alabama Cavalry, was captured during his brief term of service, paroled and lived into the twentieth century.¹⁰³²

[John Spinks Kennedy](#) (1818 – 1899) was another successful attorney and entrepreneur. Educated at La Grange, he studied law and was admitted to the bar, serving terms in the legislature in 1841, 1842 and again in 1847. Over time, he became wealthy owning and operating cotton textile mills.¹⁰³³ It is likely William Dickson was a wealthy landowner in Colbert County, who established a firearms manufactory in central Georgia in the midst of the Civil War to produce needed weaponry for the Confederacy.¹⁰³⁴ Dr. James W. Stewart was the other donor whose generosity was noted; little is known of his life. He too seems to have generated considerable wealth from his investment in woolen and cotton mills in the Shoals area.¹⁰³⁵

[Samuel D. Weakley](#) (1812 – 1897) was a wealthy and influential entrepreneur. In addition to owning the [Cypress Cotton Mills Company](#), he was a large stockholder in the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, and was instrumental in bringing a spur of that line to Florence; he owned

¹⁰³¹ Kirkland, Thomas. “[A Quarter Race in Kentucky](#).” In William T. Porter, ed. [A Quarter Race in Kentucky, and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Scenes, Characters, and Incidents, Throughout "The Universal Yankee Nation"](#). Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847. pp. 12-25. Kirkman publishes as “A North Alabamian.”

¹⁰³² “[Pvt. George W. Karsner](#).” Find a Grave. Online Website. Accessed December 2, 2025.

¹⁰³³ Garrett, William G. [Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama, for Thirty Years, With an Appendix](#). Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company Press, 1872; Owen, Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 3, 1921, p. 850.

¹⁰³⁴ Saunders, James Edmonds and Elizabeth Saunders Blair Stubbs. [Early Settlers of Alabama with Notes and Genealogies](#). Vol. 1. New Orleans, Graham and Son, 1899, p. 177.

¹⁰³⁵ “[Remembering the Shoals, Its People, Its Places, Its History](#).” Online Web Site. Accessed December 3, 2025

impressive holdings in Chicago. He was also a philanthropist and his largesse was instrumental in the development of Florence Wesleyan as well as its female counterpart, the Synodical Female College.¹⁰³⁶

Together, these families embodied the economic logic of the region: slave-labor cotton agriculture supported by auxiliary enterprises and transportation networks. Their investments in Florence Wesleyan were investments in the reproduction of their social world.

The Legal and Political Elite

A formidable contingent of attorneys, legislators, and judges reinforced the institution's civic authority. Three of the trustees were attorneys who each at various times served as a Judge for the 4th Judicial Circuit of Alabama: Posey, Moore, and Wood. [Sidney Cherry Posey](#) (1803-1868), planter and slaveholder, was an influential legislator, serving in both the Alabama House of Representatives (1835-1836) and the Senate (1837-1838 and 1844-1845). While a slaveholder, Posey was something of a moderate on the issue of secession and moved slowly to accept the decision of the state to withdraw. He would lose a son in the course of the Civil War.¹⁰³⁷ [John E. Moore](#) (1829-1904) was a Judge for the 4th Judicial Circuit of Alabama, 1853-1863 and again 1880-1905. His father, Wooten, came from North Carolina and maintained a large cotton plantation in Perry County. John attended the nascent Howard College in Marion, and received his B. A. and M. A. degrees from the University of Alabama. In 1850 he began reading law in the office of J. W. Garrett and was admitted to the bar in 1851.¹⁰³⁸ [William Basil Wood](#) (1820 –



Figure 77. William Basil Wood

¹⁰³⁶ "[Samuel Davis Weakley](#)." Obituaries. Lauderdale County. *The Florence Times*, 6 February 1897. From Rootsweb.com. Accessed December 2, 2025; [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, Online edition, n. p.

¹⁰³⁷ Freeman, Lee. "[A House Divided: Lauderdale Countians and the Civil War](#)." Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area website. Accessed December 2, 2025.

¹⁰³⁸ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 709, p. 91; [Alabama Bench and Bar Historical Newsletter](#), July – September

1891) was among the elite of the Tennessee Valley. His paternal grandfather was secretary to Alexander Hamilton and his father an officer in the War of 1812. Wood attended La Grange College and studied law under Daniel Coleman (1801 -1857), attorney and judge from Limestone County, and appointed to the Supreme Court of Alabama in 1851. Wood to was Judge of the 4th Judicial Circuit of Alabama, 1866-1868. President of the Florence Land, Mining & Manufacturing Company, of the W. B. Wood Furnace Company, and of the Charcoal & Chemical Company, of the Florence, along with many other holdings, William Basil Wood was a looming presence in all facets of Valley life, including Florence Wesleyan University.¹⁰³⁹

[Daniel Coleman](#) (1801-1857) was a dominant presence in the legal profession in North Alabama. A Virginian by birth, he graduated from Transylvania University and read law in Frankfort, Kentucky under [Judge Jesse Bledsoe](#). He became a judge in Limestone County Alabama before the age of 19 and by 1829 represented the county in the state legislature. One of his sons, James L. Coleman graduated from La Grange College and became a minister, and two others Daniel and John Hartwell graduated from Florence Wesleyan, subsequently earning law degrees at the University of Virginia.¹⁰⁴⁰ Born in Virginia, [Wiley Turner Watkins](#) (1808-1862) was another judge in the Florence area.

Trustee [Richard Wilde Walker](#) (1823-1874) was born in Huntsville, the son of U. S. Senator [John Williams Walker](#). His mother was the daughter of LeRoy Pope. After attending Spring Hill College and the University of Virginia, he graduated from Princeton. He practiced his legal profession in both Huntsville and Florence, and served in the state legislature. He became an Associate Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court

2022, p. 9. (Note: there is some confusion given the presence in North Alabama of another John Edmond Moore, brother of [Sydenham Moore](#) (1817-1862). Their sister, [Olivia](#), married Edward Asbury O'Neal. [John Edmond Moore](#) (1815-1865) died of injuries received during the Civil War). They were the children of [Alfred Moore](#) of Madison County. John Edmond did run against and was defeated by Posey for the 5th Circuit Court. And he served in the legislature representing Lauderdale in 1847. See Garrett, William G. [Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama, for Thirty Years, With an Appendix](#). Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company Press, 1872, p. 477.

¹⁰³⁹ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 727; [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p.311.

¹⁰⁴⁰ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p.87.

in 1859. He would administer the oath of office to Jefferson Davis when he was installed as the president of the Confederate States.¹⁰⁴¹ To the list of politicians and legislators can be added the name of [Toliver Towles](#) (1800-1873) of Chambers County, Alabama, some 250 miles from Florence by road. At the time of his appointment, he was serving in the Alabama House.¹⁰⁴²

[Robert Miller Patton](#) (1809-1885) was the classic oligarchic leader. Owner of [Sweetwater Plantation](#) and a very successful planter, he was

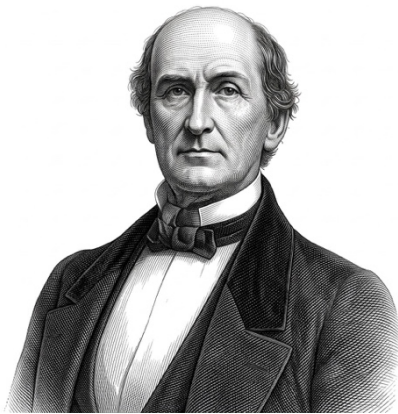


Figure 78. Robert Miller Patton.

elected to the legislature in 1832 and represented the region almost continuously until secession. Like many in the Valley, personally opposed secession from the Union, but with the outbreak of war gave his full support to the South. Three of his sons served the Army, William dying at Shiloh and Robert killed near Selma. He was elected governor in 1865 and worked to overcome the wave of starvation that pervaded the state in aftermath of war.¹⁰⁴³

Educators, Professionals, and the La Grange Continuity

A subset of trustees represented the educational tradition of La Grange. Their contributions ensured continuity of curriculum, discipline, and institutional memory. [Septimus Primus Rice](#)'s (1818-1893) role as Secretary to the board likely contributed to his longevity with Florence Wesleyan through the bleak war years and his emergence as a figure in the school's later transformation into a state normal college. Professor Rice will be discussed further later in the chapter.

As previously seen, [Alexander Little Page Green](#) (1807-1874) was an indefatigable supporter of Florence Wesleyan College, urging the

¹⁰⁴¹ "[Richard Wilde Walker](#)". *Civil War Talk Web site*. Accessed December 3, 2025

¹⁰⁴² [The Voice of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and Cobb Memorial Archive](#), p. 10. Online. Accessed December 7, 2025.

¹⁰⁴³ Thomas Hartwell Owen, Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 4, 1921, p. 1328; McDonald, William Lindsey. [A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama](#). Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 49.

Tennessee Conference to approve La Grange's relocation from the mountain. He was also a slaveholder and pro slavery in his advocacy. As his biographer observed, "he favored the institution when it was properly controlled and a blessing to the slave. He believed the Negro incompetent and unfitted for self-government, and hence a wise, good master was a necessity."¹⁰⁴⁴ Later in life, he would be one of several individuals connected with La Grange that played a role in the founding of Vanderbilt University.

Other members of the Florence Board of Trustees with historic ties to La Grange College were [Robert Paine](#), the former president and now Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; [John Berry McFerrin](#) (1807-1887), John W. Hanner, Oscar Fitzaland Casey, and Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. Rev. McFerrin was a prominent member of the church, at the apex of his career serving as pastor of the McKendree Church in Nashville. Remarkably he converted both President Polk and Cherokee leader John Ross (and La Grange trustee) to Methodism. He worked hard on behalf of La Grange and was awarded the honorary doctorate in 1851.¹⁰⁴⁵ John Wesley Hanner (1818-1898) also labored to sustain La Grange College, serving tirelessly as a fund-raising agent on its behalf.¹⁰⁴⁶ Like Septimus Rice, [Oscar Fitzaland Casey](#) was a representative of the faculty, soon to head to Southern University. [Thomas Hubbard Hobbs](#) was among the Athenians on the board. A graduate of La Grange during Tutwiler's time on the faculty, he meticulously documented his time on the campus, leaving valuable documentation of the life of students in the antebellum South. Suffering the fate of many other former students, his life would be cut short on the Civil War battlefields. Joining him from Athens was Benjamin W. Maclin,

¹⁰⁴⁴ Green, Rev. William M. [The Life and Letters of A. L. P. Green](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877, p. 167.

¹⁰⁴⁵ "John Berry McFerrin." Wikipedia. Online. Accessed December 4, 2025; West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 625; O. P. Fitzgerald. [John B. McFerrin: A Biography](#). Nashville TN: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South. 1888, p. 237.

¹⁰⁴⁶ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p.648; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 187.

member of the board of trustees of the newly chartered [Athens College](#) for women. His home, built in 1849, was said to be the finest in Athens.¹⁰⁴⁷

The Methodist Clergy and Denominational Intelligentsia

Of course, there were other Florence Wesleyan Board members with strong ties to the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and likely secured appointments through its influence. [John Tabb Baskerville](#) (1802-1873) was a Methodist minister, a physician, and plantation owner from Tennessee; his appointment may have been as representative of the Memphis Conference.¹⁰⁴⁸ Reverend [Jefferson Hamilton](#) of Saint Francis Methodist Church in Mobile, a published author, may have been appointed by the Alabama Conference.¹⁰⁴⁹ The [Rev. Edgar M. Swoope](#) (1805-1867) was from Courtland, a location from which most were opposing the move of La Grange to Florence.¹⁰⁵⁰ The Rev. [Phineas Thomas Scruggs](#) (1806-1878) may have represented the Mississippi Conference.¹⁰⁵¹

[Thomas Osmond Summers](#) (1812–1882) was regarded in his own day as one of the most influential Methodist theologians in the South, the intellectual anchor of MEC, South theology. At the time of his appointment to the Florence Wesleyan board, he was living in Nashville, serving as general editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* and supervising the entire catalog of Sunday School publications for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He was a prolific writer, publishing scores of doctrinal, devotional, and polemical works. Aligning seamlessly with the Valley's planter elite, many of his writings advanced or defended the theological and biblical rationales for slavery as embraced by the local culture.¹⁰⁵²

¹⁰⁴⁷ "[Scenes from Hobbs and Market Streets.](#)" *The Historical Marker Database*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025; "[Athens College.](#)" *Genealogy Trails History Group*. Limestone County. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025

¹⁰⁴⁸ "[John T. Baskerville.](#)" *BiblePortal Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025; "[John T. Baskerville.](#)" *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025

¹⁰⁴⁹ [Alabama Church and Synagogue Records, 1805-2019. Finding Aid.](#) Alabama Department of Archives and History, 624 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36130 www.archives.alabama.gov

¹⁰⁵⁰ "[Rev. Edgar M. Swoope.](#)" *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025

¹⁰⁵¹ "[Rev. Phineas Thomas Scruggs.](#)" *Family Search*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025

¹⁰⁵² "[Thomas Osmond Summers.](#)" *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 5, 2025. This Wikipedia link provides an overview of his many publications; O.P. Fitzgerald. [Dr. Summers: A Life Study](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1885.

Even more enigmatic is the figure of [Moses Montgomery Henkle](#) (1798–1864). Beginning his ministerial life as an itinerant preacher in the Ohio Conference around 1819, Henkle gradually gravitated southward, eventually affiliating by the mid-1850s with the Tennessee Conference. From his base in Huntsville, he served as agent for the Endowment Fund of the Chair of Biblical Literature and Ecclesiastical History at Florence Wesleyan University until the close of his pastorate there in October 1858.¹⁰⁵³ Henkle was also an able writer. He published a substantial biography of Bishop Henry Bidleman Bascom, the leading Methodist opponent of abolition and a principal architect of the Southern church's defense of slaveholding. In addition, his 1851 *Primary Platform of Methodism* offered a systematic exposition of Methodist discipline and polity—one that accommodated the legal and civil reality of slavery and rejected abolitionist demands for ecclesiastical separation from slaveholders.¹⁰⁵⁴

In the chapter on slavery, Henkle explicitly declined the Northern abolitionist position that slaveholding should be treated as a moral bar to Christian fellowship. As he summarized the abolitionist demand:

The answer from the abolitionists of the North, is, 'Denounce it, in all its forms, as sin, and withdraw Christian fellowship from all slaveholders.' This may do for declamation, to inflame one portion of our country against another; but is not reasonable, practicable, nor in accordance with Apostolic example.

He continued:

*Our own Church commenced, early, a very stringent course of action on this subject, but was compelled to abandon it, because it was utterly impracticable, and tended to bring the Church into conflict with the civil authorities of the country.*¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵³ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 677.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Henkle, M. M. Rev. [The Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom, D. D., LL. D. Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Louisville: Morton & Griswold, 1854; Henkle, Moses Montgomery, Rev. [Primary Platform of Methodism, Or Exposition of the General Roles](#). Louisville: Published by the author. 1851.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Henkle, Moses Montgomery, Rev. [Primary Platform of Methodism, Or Exposition of the General Roles](#). Louisville: Published by the author. 1851, p. 184.

The enigma related to Henkle is the assertion by Lindsey McDonald, local historian in the Shoals, that he was “an active Union agent” for most of the war until his death in Richmond in 1864 where he met an untimely deal, perhaps in retribution. While it is true that Henkle could move freely between the North and South, it is not apparent that he was in Unionist employ. Editor of the *Nashville Christian Advocate*, he was in Philadelphia working on a publication project when the war broke out. Unable to return to Nashville, he and his family members made their way to Baltimore where his brother Eli and his son, a wealthy physician lived. The son, Eli Jones Henkle had been the source of needed support for Moses through the years. There, he found employment at Baltimore Female College, where he remained until his refusal to take an oath of allegiance to President Lincoln led to his exile by the federals through the line to Richmond. Already in poor health from his travails, he died of typhoid in Richmond in June. 1864.¹⁰⁵⁶

To the Methodist intelligentsia who ensured the deep integration of pro-slavery ecclesiology into the intellectual life of Florence Wesleyan University must be added the [President Richard Henderson Rivers](#), already extensively treated. It was while serving as Florence Wesleyan University’s President that he published his text [Elements of Moral Philosophy](#) (1859) embracing the theological and civil tenets of slavery. It is relevant to repeat the text of its preface here:

*It is the only work on moral philosophy which gives a full and correct view of the slavery question. It shows to the youth of the land that slavery is not a sin, that it was established originally by the Devine Being, for wise, just and benevolent purposes; that it was directly sanctioned by Christ and his apostles, and is not, therefore the sum of all evils.*¹⁰⁵⁷

Taken together, the presence of Summers and Henkle on the Florence Wesleyan board, and Richard Henderson Rivers at its helm,

¹⁰⁵⁶ Obituary. Moses Montgomery Henkle. *Richmond Whig*, June 11, 1864; Stapleton, A. [The Henkle Memorial: Historical, Genealogical, Biographical](#). York, PA: A. Stapleton, 1910, p. 144; [Moses Montgomery Henkle](#). Find a Grave. Online. Accessed December 7, 2025 (provides copy of *Whig* obituary).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 184. Vaughn quotes ’ preface of 1859 which is removed from subsequent editions.

reflects the institution's alignment with the dominant intellectual posture of the MEC, South: a willingness to reconcile Christian ecclesiology with the civil and legal structures supporting slavery, and rejection of the abolitionist insistence that slaveholding was incompatible with Christian ministry or fellowship.

The Relationship of the Town and the College.

The relocation of La Grange College to Florence in 1855 found a welcoming citizenry. Florence had already cultivated a layered system of preparatory institutions that furnished a steady stream of college-eligible young men and women. These first academies, both male and female, formed an indispensable town-gown substrate long before the Methodists planted Florence Wesleyan University in the midst of the city. Indeed, the Methodist enterprise relied upon, and ultimately absorbed, local initiatives dating back more than two decades. In Florence, as elsewhere on the frontier, the first schools were usually of an archetype referred to in American educational history as the "adventure school."

In the lexicon of American educational development, an adventure school was a small, independently operated enterprise, often run by a single teacher or a married couple, following educational opportunity across the expanding frontier, and usually found in thinly settled communities before denominational or community schools took shape. Operating without charters, boards or fixed governance, the schools were characterized by their entrepreneurial base, dependence upon tuition and boarding fees rather than civic taxation or sectarian subsidy. The curriculum was eclectic, offering a blend of rudimentary academics and ornamental courses, such as music, penmanship, drawing and needlework. Educational historians emphasize that these schools filled a crucial transitional role. They were the only sustained opportunity for structured study, addressing the immediate instructional needs of middle-class families, especially girls, during periods when neither public systems or chartered schools yet existed.¹⁰⁵⁸

In this sense, adventure schools should not be understood as aberrations or primitive failures later corrected by institutional maturity.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Woody, Thomas. [*A History of Women's Education in the United States*](#). New York: The Science Press, 1929, pp. 149-153.

Rather, they represented the frontier's first pragmatic response to the demand for education—improvised, market-driven, and responsive to local expectations. As communities stabilized, these entrepreneurial ventures gave way to academies and seminaries that imposed greater regularity, permanence, and curricular hierarchy upon instruction. Governance structures emerged; classical sequences were standardized; denominational or civic sponsorship replaced individual proprietorship. Yet this evolution did not mark a retreat from ideology. If anything, the movement from adventure school to academy and finally to chartered college entailed the progressive consolidation of intellectual and moral authority. What began as flexible accommodation hardened into orthodoxy, as educational institutions became instruments through which communities articulated, enforced, and reproduced their preferred social, religious, and moral orders.

The most important of these early institutions was the Florence Male Academy, known throughout the antebellum era as “Prepdom.” In 1834-35, civic leaders -- conscious of Florence's rising commercial ambitions and eager to cultivate a learned elite -- purchased a property on West Tombigbee Street and established a permanent classical academy for boys.¹⁰⁵⁹ An unchartered school without denominational school sponsorship, “Prepdom” quickly became synonymous with academic rigor in the Tennessee Valley. Its faculty roster repeatedly drew upon classically trained Presbyterian ministers, reflecting the powerful intellectual footprint of Presbyterian clergy across the Upper South and the Tennessee Valley. Among the most notable were [James L. Sloss](#) (1771-1841) and—if later recollections are to be credited--the eminent [Rev. Dr. Elijah Slack](#), Princeton-trained chemist and minister whose Alabama sojourn remains only partially documented.¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁹ Gilbert, H.C. “[H. C. Gilbert Address to the Florence Rotary Club, 12 September, 1921](#)”. Rootsweb. Ancestry.com Online. Accessed December 8, 2025; William Lindsey McDonald. *A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama*. Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Local tradition, first recorded in H. C. Gilbert's 1921 address on Florence schools, recalls a “Rev. Dr. Slack” teaching in the town between 1840 and 1850. William Lindsey McDonald later identified this figure as the Princeton-trained chemist and Presbyterian minister Elijah Slack (1784–1866), describing him as supply pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and a teacher at the Florence Male Academy. Modern biographical work confirms that Slack left Cincinnati in 1837, briefly operated a girls' high school in Brownsville, Tennessee, and “later taught at various secondary schools in Alabama” before returning to Cincinnati in 1844.¹ No surviving Presbytery

The curriculum of the Academy reflected the classical template then standard for admission into Southern colleges. Students advanced through Latin grammar to Caesar and Virgil, then to Greek grammar, Xenophon, and the New Testament. Mathematics extended from arithmetic through Euclid. Geography; rhetoric, and moral philosophy rounded out a curriculum that mirrored the preparatory departments at La Grange and Florence Wesleyan. Prepdome's graduates fed naturally first into La Grange College and thereafter into Florence Wesleyan.¹⁰⁶¹ When Florence Wesleyan moved to town in 1855, its Preparatory head, Septimus Price, set up his operations at Prepdome, about a mile from the main campus. From there, Price could draw upon the most qualified students on the university campus to help him with the preparatory students, and he could select from among the latter those most able to secure their admission into the college curriculum.¹⁰⁶² This hybrid model—part apprenticeship, part filter—continued the adventure school ethos while simultaneously professionalizing it under Methodist oversight.

minutes, session records of First Presbyterian Church, or contemporary Florence newspapers document a formal appointment for Slack in Florence or mention his supplying the local pulpit. Until such primary evidence emerges, the identification of Gilbert's "Rev. Dr. Slack" with Elijah Slack—and the claim that he served as supply pastor of the Florence church—must be regarded as informed but unverified conjecture. A second claim in Gilbert's list, that the later Confederate general [Thomas Neville Waul](#) taught at the Florence Male Academy, likewise remains unsupported by any contemporaneous documentation and is chronologically improbable. See: University of Cincinnati, "Homepages+," [biography of Elijah Slack.](#)"; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, 27.

¹⁰⁶¹ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889.](#) Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889.

¹⁰⁶² McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 27.

Running parallel to Prepdrom was a flourishing tradition of female instruction. In June 1834, just as the Florence Male Academy, opened its doors, [Nicholas Marcellus Hentz](#) (1797-1856), noted French American educator and accomplished arachnologist¹⁰⁶³ opened in concert with his wife [Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz](#) (1800-1856) Locust Dell Academy for women on twelve acres purchased from the O’Neal family. Although not at the height of her fame, and not yet writing to secure the family’s income, Caroline was already a published author of acclaim.¹⁰⁶⁴ A boarding school, during its nine and a half years of operation in Florence, as many as one hundred young women would be enrolled. Additionally, Nicholas operated a silkworm industry in Florence, selling both the mulberry trees and the worms.¹⁰⁶⁵ Somewhat later, after leaving Florence, the Hentz’s would leave the education profession, and Caroline would embark upon a remarkably successful career, publishing novels in the “[anti-Tom](#)” tradition, evoking the charms of plantation life and defending slavery—a reaction to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s best-selling anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published in 1852.¹⁰⁶⁶ Pivotaly, Florence represented Catherine Hentz’s introduction to the South’s plantation society and culture, serving as one author noted, the “intellectual fodder” for her many novel on plantation domestic life. In the almost ten years they were in residence, the Hentz family attended many lyceum lectures, dinner



79. Caroline Lee Hentz

¹⁰⁶³ Hentz, Nicholas Marcellus. [The Spiders of the United States: A Collection of the Arachnological Writings of Nicholas Marcellus Hentz](#). Edward Burgess, ed. Boston: Boston Society of Natural History, 1875.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Stansea, Jamie. “[Caroline Lee whiting Hentz \(1800-1856\).](#)” *Legacy* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1996), pp. 130-141

¹⁰⁶⁵ Harry E. Wallace. [History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History](#). A series published in four parts in the Florence Times-Daily February 25, 1999- and accessible via Rootsweb (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~allauder/historyshoals1.htm>) and housed by author in Instapaper. Accessed December 8, 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Neva Renegar Moran. *Caroline Lee Hentz, an Early Southern Novelist. A Study of the Life and Works of Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz*. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Birmingham-Southern College, 1937. Perhaps the best example of the Hentz affirmation of slavery and plantation culture is [The Planter’s Northern Bride](#). Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1854.

gatherings and camp meetings in plantation settings.¹⁰⁶⁷ Ironically, from immersion in that same culture another female northern instructor who worked in the Valley, Kate E. Reynolds Pickard, would pen a study that stands as an indictment of slavery's cruelty, calling into question the morality of the plantation system.¹⁰⁶⁸

What unfolded in Florence and Tuscumbia during the 1830s–1850s was therefore not merely an institutional prelude to Florence Wesleyan but a contest over the cultural meaning of education itself, waged in parlors, classrooms, and in the expanding national print culture of the 1850s. The works of Caroline Lee Hentz and Kate E. Reynolds Pickard—products of teachers who had stood within a few miles of one another on opposite banks of the Tennessee—illustrate that the region's schools transmitted far more than Latin paradigms and ornamental accomplishments. They incubated competing moral imaginations. In Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride*, distilled from her decade at Locust Dell, the plantation household appears as a civilizing organism whose gendered hierarchies and enslaved labor were, in her view, woven into a benevolent architecture of Christian order.¹⁰⁶⁹ Pickard, teaching at Tuscumbia Female Seminary scarcely ten miles away, produced *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed*, a counternarrative grounded in the lived experience of Peter Still, whose routine labor in the seminary's orbit exposed her to the daily mechanics of bondage that Hentz's novel romanticized away. That those two women instructors—both northern-born, both immersed in the same Tennessee Valley culture—could articulate radically different visions of Southern society reveals the intellectual volatility simmering beneath the town's educational enterprises. It further underscores that when Florence Wesleyan emerged in the mid-1850s, it did so within a cultural atmosphere already thick with debates over slavery, Christian moral philosophy, and the social purposes of higher learning. The university's trustees, dominated by planters, jurists, and Methodist clergy, were not simply creating a new

¹⁰⁶⁷ Stansea, Jamie. "[Caroline Lee whitening Hentz \(1800-1856\)](#)." *Legacy* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1996), p. 132. JSTOR. UT Libraries. Kindle Book download; Hentz, Charles A. [A Southern practice: the diary and autobiography of Charles A. Hentz, M.D.](#) Steven M. Stowe, ed. Publications of the Southern Texts Society. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Pickard, Kate E. Reynolds. [The Kidnapped and the Ransomed](#). Syracuse: William T. Hamilton, 1856.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Joy Jordan-Lake, [Whitewashing Uncle Tom's Cabin: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists Respond to Stowe](#), Vanderbilt University Press, 2005

denominational college; they were attempting to stabilize the ideological center of a region where even its schoolteachers were producing nationally circulated texts that either defended or dismantled the moral foundations of the slaveholding republic. Florence Wesleyan thus entered a field already charged with intellectual energy—a community where education was inseparable from the competing public narratives through which North Alabamians imagined their society, justified its hierarchies, and argued over its future.¹⁰⁷⁰

Across the Tennessee Valley, similar educational ecologies took shape in Huntsville, Tuscumbia, Athens and Courtland, each incorporating its own blend of adventure schools and emerging academies.¹⁰⁷¹ Huntsville supported a remarkably early network of private instructors and classical tutors; many associated with the town's prosperous mercantile elite.¹⁰⁷² Tuscumbia and Athens both witnessed the rise of mixed gender and female seminaries operating on a private or subscription basis.¹⁰⁷³ Courtland, briefly a commercial rival of Florence, sustained a cluster of small preparatory ventures tied to its ambitions as a river and rail hub. These towns collectively formed a regional matrix of provisional education institutions whose stability, resources and curricular models directly influenced Florence's own move from entrepreneurial schooling to more fully chartered academies and denominational higher education.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Moss, Elizabeth. Domestic [*Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of the Southern Culture*](#). Southern Literary Studies. 1992. UT Libraries. Also available online; Kate E. R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed: Being the Personal Recollections of Peter Still and His Wife "Vina,"* ed. Samuel J. May, appendix by William H. Furness (Syracuse: William T. Hamilton, 1856), Introduction by May, pp. v–xiii; William Dillon Pierson, "From Slavery to Freedom: The Case of Peter Still," in *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 103–118. UT Libraries. Available online. For a harsh post-war indictment of the evils and consequences of slavery, see the novel by the wife of carpetbagger George E. Spencer—Bella Zilfer Spencer's [*Tried and True, Or Love and Loyalty, A Story of the Great Rebellion*](#). Springfield: W. J. Holland, 1866.

¹⁰⁷¹ [Acts Passed at the Fourth Annual Session of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama, Begun and Held at the Town of Cahawba, on the Third Monday of November, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Two](#) (Cahawba: William B. Allen & Co., Printers to the State, 1823), p. 122–23, Act 98, "To incorporate the trustees of Athens female academy, in Limestone county." Internet Archive, p. 122-23, image 574–75

¹⁰⁷² Skipper, O. C. "[Huntsville's Green Academy, 1812-1862.](#)" *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 1972)

¹⁰⁷³ Nina Leftwich. [*Two Hundred Years at Muscle Shoals: Being an Authentic History of Colbert County 1700-1900 with Special Emphasis on the Stirring Events of the Early Times*](#). Tuscumbia: Nina Leftwich, 1935, pp. 123-124.

By mid-century, however, the adventure school model entered a new phase of institutional consolidation, culminating in the founding of the Florence Synodical Female College and the arrival of Florence Wesleyan. The educational landscape of Florence did not collapse when Nicholas and Caroline Hentz closed their celebrated Locust Dell Female Academy in 1843; rather, their departure exposed a vacuum and stirred the town to renewed effort. Contemporary accounts confirm that Locust Dell had been a wholly private, entrepreneurial venture—run first in Cincinnati, then in Florence—dependent upon tuition, reputation, and the proprietors’ energy rather than corporate or ecclesiastical backing. When the Hentz family withdrew, Florence suddenly found itself without a female academy of standing, a loss keenly felt in an ambitious river town aspiring to cultural distinction. The response was civic rather than denominational: in 1847, the Alabama Legislature chartered the Florence Female Academy as a locally governed corporation intended to replace the Hentz enterprise with something more stable and publicly anchored. The city supplemented this charter with significant financial contributions, hoping to translate local ambition into institutional permanence.¹⁰⁷⁴ Yale educated [Samuel Stiles Stebbins](#) (1794-1860) moved from New York to serve as its initial headmaster.¹⁰⁷⁵

The 1847 charter was not merely aspirational—it produced a physical campus. Historic summaries, including the Florence historical marker and local architectural studies, note that two substantial brick academy buildings were erected that year on the square long reserved by the Cypress Land Company for educational purposes.¹⁰⁷⁶ One structure fronted what is now Wilson Park and served as the principal academic hall; the other—later the Elks Club building—functioned as dormitory space. Both were attributed in local memory to contractor and cabinetmaker [Zebulon Pike Morrison](#), whose work reflects the maturing architectural vocabulary of antebellum Florence.¹⁰⁷⁷ This marked a transition from the Hentz model of personal enterprise to a naïve but earnest community-supported academy, a civic investment meant to stabilize female education in the city. Yet, for all its promise, the Florence Female Academy remained chronically underfunded; despite a substantial municipal subvention—reportedly as

¹⁰⁷⁴ [“Florence Alabama.”](#) *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025

¹⁰⁷⁵ “Samuel Stiles Stebbins,” *Geni*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025; Gilbert, H.C. [“H. C. Gilbert Address to the Florence Rotary Club, 12 September, 1921”](#).

¹⁰⁷⁶ [“1800-1849: Local Florence Schools Established.”](#) Online. Accessed December 9, 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁷ “Pope’s Tavern Museum Post.” Online. Accessed December 9, 2025

high as \$20,000, an extraordinary sum for a frontier town—it struggled to attract sustained enrollment or meet operating expenses.¹⁰⁷⁸

By the early 1850s the enterprise had faltered. The Academy soon found itself in serious financial trouble, according to the *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, and faced the prospect of bankruptcy. Rather than closing and allowing the site and buildings to decay, the mayor, aldermen, and academy trustees sought a denominational guarantor who could preserve a female college in Florence with greater stability than civic subscription could muster.¹⁰⁷⁹ Their solution was the [Presbyterian Synod of Nashville](#), which agreed to assume control of the property and continue the educational mission. On November 25, 1854, the trustees formally deeded the land, buildings, and equipment to the Synod—a decisive transfer that shifted Florence’s female education from community sponsorship to denominational stewardship. Classes began under Synodical authority almost immediately, and by October 1854 the institution was operating in the former Academy buildings.¹⁰⁸⁰ James L. Rogers was the first president of the institution.

The final stage of this maturation occurred when the Synod sought legal incorporation. On December 13, 1855, the Alabama Legislature passed the charter establishing the Florence Synodical Female College, explicitly vesting the Synod’s trustees with title to the plant previously held by the Florence Female Academy. Governor John A. Winston vetoed the bill, as he also did the charter of Florence Wesleyan University in the same period, but on both occasions the Legislature overrode the veto, signaling the strength of statewide support for expanding denominational higher education.¹⁰⁸¹ Many of the trustees were the same people charged with the governance of Florence Wesleyan: Robert M. Patton, Richard Wilde Walker, Sydney C. Posey, Thomas Kirkman, Samuel D. Weakley, Benjamin F. Foster, and John S. Kennedy. Benjamin Franklin Foster represented the good will of the three brothers on this board; the other two busied themselves

¹⁰⁷⁸ [“Florence Synodical Female College.”](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025

¹⁰⁷⁹ [“Florence Synodical Female College.”](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025

¹⁰⁸⁰ [“Florence Synodical Female College.”](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025.

¹⁰⁸¹ [“Florence Synodical Female College.”](#) *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025

with the governance of Florence Wesleyan.¹⁰⁸² With the 1855 act, female education in Florence completed its arc: from the entrepreneurial Hentz school (1834–43) to a civic academy erected at public expense (1847), and finally to an incorporated denominational college holding clear legal and financial footing on the same site. The continuity of place masked a profound institutional evolution—from private venture to community aspiration to fully chartered Presbyterian college—that paralleled the broader professionalization and sectarian structuring of education across antebellum Alabama.

Florence Wesleyan Comes of Age.

Opening in 1855 well before its campus was built, Florence Wesleyan held classes the first year in the Masonic Temple. When LaGrange College was relocated to Florence and finally reconstituted by legislative charter as *Florence Wesleyan University* in February 1856, its trustees sought not merely the transfer of an institution but the creation of an architectural symbol that would announce the college's prestige and permanence. With Methodist ambition rising in the Tennessee Valley, the board deliberately turned to a figure of regional reputation: [Adolphus Heiman](#) (1809 – 1862), the Nashville-based architect already known for major civic, ecclesiastical, and educational structures throughout the Upper South. The decision to employ Heiman marked a conscious effort to import professional architectural culture into Florence. To translate Heiman's vision into brick and mortar, the trustees relied on a local master-builder of remarkable versatility—[Zebulon Pike Morrison](#) (1818 – 1895), cabinetmaker, contractor, alderman, and later mayor of Florence. Together, Heiman and Morrison produced the most architecturally sophisticated building in antebellum North Alabama: [Wesleyan Hall](#), a castellated Gothic structure that would dominate the educational landscape of the Tennessee Valley for the next two decades and



Figure 81. Adolphus Heiman as Confederate Colonel

¹⁰⁸² “[Florence Synodical Female College](#).” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 9, 2025.

become an enduring architectural emblem of the University of North Alabama.¹⁰⁸³

Adolphus Heiman was born in Potsdam, Prussia, trained as a stonecutter, and immigrated to the United States in 1834. After brief work in New York and New Orleans, he settled in Nashville by 1837, where his combination of artisanal training, engineering skill, and continental academic polish quickly elevated him into the ranks of the city's leading architects.¹⁰⁸⁴ His reputation expanded still further after the Mexican War—where he served with distinction and returned as a brevet major—allowing him to secure commissions of increasing scale and ambition. Among the most notable were the Tennessee Hospital for the Insane (1849–55), a vast Gothic Revival complex; the Cathedral of the Assumption (St. Mary's) in



80. Wesleyan Hall. Florence Wesleyan College. Augustus Pruskowski Watercolor

¹⁰⁸³ Tucker, Dylan. "Wesleyan Hall Marker." Omeka at Auburn. Online. Accessed December 10, 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Patrick, James. "[The Architecture of Adolphus Heiman. Part One: Castellated and Grecian, 1837 – 1853](#)." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 38, No. 2, (Summer 1979 pp. 167-187; Patrick, James. "*Tennessee Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 28, No. 3 Fall 1979. Pp. 277 -299. "Adolphus Heiman." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 10, 2025

Nashville; the Medical Department and Literary Building of the University of Nashville; and several ecclesiastical structures in the Tennessee Valley, including the Presbyterian churches at Huntsville and Courtland.¹⁰⁸⁵

When Florence Wesleyan's trustees sought an architect, Heiman was arguably the most accomplished designer working in the region. His Gothic Revival vocabulary, already displayed in the Tennessee asylum and in institutional buildings at the University of Nashville, made him an attractive choice for a college intent on projecting academic dignity and denominational seriousness. The decision to employ Heiman placed Florence within a broader antebellum impulse to adopt romantic and "collegiate Gothic" forms, which were increasingly identified with moral uplift and the seriousness of higher education. Heiman's plans for Wesleyan Hall incorporated many hallmarks of the mid-century Gothic: battlemented parapets, corner towers, vertical emphases, **and a picturesque, irregular silhouette.** The National Register nomination for the building later observed that the floor plan resembled one of Heiman's earlier church designs—suggesting that the architect reworked a familiar ecclesiastical scheme for the needs of a liberal-arts college. This blending of church-derived forms with collegiate requirements was typical of Heiman's creative method and consistent with the Methodist desire to place the college within a morally charged architectural idiom.¹⁰⁸⁶

Heiman himself did not remain on site during construction, but his drawings and specifications governed every stage of the work. The success of the building would depend, therefore, on the competence and artistry of its local builder. The trustees' selection of [Zebulon Pike Morrison](#) would prove decisive. Morrison came to Florence from Lexington, Virginia, where as a young man he had apprenticed as a cabinetmaker. By the 1840s he had established himself in Florence as a craftsman of unusual versatility—operating not only as a cabinetmaker and coffin-maker, but as a builder, bridge constructor, distiller, alderman, and eventually **mayor**, holding municipal office for a full decade (1880–90).⁶ Morrison belonged to the class of Southern artisan-contractors who, though lacking formal architectural training, possessed a disciplined command of joinery, proportion, and structural technique. His later buildings, notably the

¹⁰⁸⁵ John G. Frank, "Adolphus Heiman: Architect and Soldier," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 5 (1946) "Adolphus Heiman." Tennessee Encyclopedia. Online. Accessed December 10, 2025

¹⁰⁸⁶ "[Wesleyan Hall.](#)" Society of Architectural Historians. Online. Accessed December 10, 2025

structure of the Florence Synodical Female College, bore interior
woodwork—doors, stairways, moldings—indistinguishable from the hand
he applied in Wesleyan Hall.¹⁰⁸⁷

Where Heiman contributed the architectural **imagination**, Morrison
contributed the articulation—the translation of vision into physical
construction. The scale of the project was vast for the Shoals region.
Wesleyan Hall required a large labor force, substantial quantities of brick
(likely produced locally), and skilled woodworkers capable of executing
stairways and interior trim consistent with Heiman’s specifications. Slaves
dug the clay from nearby pits to make the bricks and provided the labor for
the masonry work. The resulting building, completed by 1856, was
immediately hailed as one of the most striking collegiate structures in
Alabama. Visitors approaching Florence by road or river would have seen its
towers rise above the tree line, making the new university an unmistakable
landmark.¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸⁷ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*A Walk Through the Past – People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama*](#). Bluewater Publications. 2003, pp. 31, 89, 91, 274; Jill Knight Garrett. [*A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama*](#). Columbus TN: Published by the author. 1964, p. 213; Kayla Scott, University of North Alabama, [*“Zebulon Pike Morrison,” Omeka at Auburn*](#), accessed December 10, 2025. Note: The print above from a drawing by Augustus Pruskowski, Florence Wesleyan Professor of Modern Languages in the early 1860s, this magnificent lithograph was printed by Robertson, Seibert, & Shearman of New York. [Gift of Dr. Larry Faulkner.](#)

¹⁰⁸⁸ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 24.

Among the trustees overseeing the project was [James Edmond](#)



Figure 82. Rocky Hill Castle

[Saunders](#), the influential planter, memoirist, and longtime public figure of Lawrence County. His presence on the board during the planning and construction stages ensures that local elites witnessed the evolution of the building at every stage—from the arrival of Heiman’s drawings to the final detailing under Morrison. While Saunders’s own residence, *Rocky Hill Castle*, begun in 1858, is the work of different craftsmen and pattern-book influences, the resemblance between Rocky Hill’s romantic, castellated features and the earlier collegiate “castle” in Florence is striking enough to suggest a shared cultural milieu. It would be prudent not to press the architectural connection too far, but the chronological sequence speaks for itself: *Wesleyan Hall preceded Rocky Hill*, and Saunders had firsthand exposure to Heiman’s Gothic design at precisely the moment when his own architectural ambitions were forming.¹⁰⁸⁹

The Significance of Wesleyan Hall. In the end, the construction of Wesleyan Hall represented a fusion of Methodist institutional aspiration, Nashville architectural sophistication, and Florence’s own artisan culture. *Heiman* supplied the architectural vocabulary—an image of collegiate ambition drawn from the Gothic Revival. *Morrison* supplied the material execution—skill, discipline, and local knowledge. Their

¹⁰⁸⁹ “Rocky Hill Castle.” *Abandoned Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 10, 2025; “Rocky Hill Castle.” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed December 11, 2025.

collaboration produced not simply a building, but an architectural statement—that Florence was prepared to stand alongside Huntsville, Athens, Tuscaloosa, and Nashville as a center of learning. Even after the decline of Florence Wesleyan University, Wesleyan Hall survived—first as a Union headquarters during the Civil War, then as a normal school building, and ultimately as the administrative heart of the University of North Alabama. Its endurance is a testament to the quality of Heiman’s design and Morrison’s craftsmanship. Of all antebellum collegiate buildings in Alabama, few combine such architectural imagination with such resilient construction. In this sense, Wesleyan Hall remains the most tangible legacy of Florence Wesleyan University and the clearest physical witness to the ambitions of its founders.

The three-story complex was the campus’ only building. Around the small campus was stood a white-washed fence, that would serve as firewood for Union and Confederate troops as they separately moved through and occupied the town. A large cistern behind the building provided water for the campus. On a bench near the building were buckets, kept filled by slaves in service to the school, with long-handed ladles or “dippers” provided to quench the thirst of students and instructors. “Old Thad,” the enslaved janitor rang the bell that summoned students to class and carried the firewood that warmed the rooms on cold days. The only other structure on the campus was a barn where faculty and students housed their mounts. Slaves owned by townspeople were rented or loaned to the campus to maintain the grounds during the Fall and Spring sessions. The second floor was where the students attended morning and evening chapel services during the week and was a likely venue for recitations and class. On the third floor of Wesleyan each of the literary societies, the Lafayette and the Dialectical, each had their own quarters, with their library collections lining one wall. The Lafayette society had to start over, as a nighttime foray back to the La Grange campus to collect and transport books and other possessions was foiled by determined pursuers who overtook the wagons before they could reach the Tennessee River, and returned the items to the mountain. Their books were supplemented by correspondence and documentation provided by notables within the students’ networks. The other walls of both were arrayed with paper decorations of each societies devising. Debates between the societies were, in fact, the sporting events of the day, and drew large crowds from the

town to hear the students joust over the topics of the day. Like the Saturday football rivalries today, the debates would spill over into discussions in retail establishments, salons, and barbershops for days afterwards.¹⁰⁹⁰ The student-edited *Southern College Magazine*, a monthly established in 1856, also attracted a supportive readership and earned critical acclaim.¹⁰⁹¹

At the time of the relocation, the citizenry seems to have accepted and to have engineered some cultural changes. At the time the college was opened, city ordinances were passed prohibiting the sale of liquor, or even the playing of billiards, ball or ninepins. Apparently, at some level this was done as a concession to the Methodists, to persuade them to acquiesce to the move. Discipline was strict, more so than the case on the mountain. Students were not permitted on the street after dark and were enjoined from carrying handguns or other deadly weapons. Parents were even beseeched not to give their sons extra spending money or allow them to establish charge accounts at local businesses.¹⁰⁹²

As the first school year unfolded, President Rivers and the trustees could feel confidence in the way Florence Wesleyan was taking root. As early as February 1855, Trustee William Basil Wood informed Rev. McFerrin through the pages of the *Nashville Advisor* (published March 1) that “La Grange College” had opened for its first session with 110 students enrolled and the prospects of more in the coming weeks.” Dr. Rivers, the talented and energetic president,” he continued, “with his corps of able professors are at their posts and have entered upon their duties with a zeal and energy that leaves no doubt of the success of the institution far surpassing any former prosperity.”¹⁰⁹³

The faculty in those carriages from La Grange to Florence were Richard Henderson Rivers, President and Professor of Moral Philosophy and Belles Lettres; Septimus Primus Rice, Professor of Pure Mathematics and

¹⁰⁹⁰ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 12, 24.-30.

¹⁰⁹¹ “Periodicals: [*The Southern College Magazine*](#),” *The Home Circle*, Vol. 2 (1856), p. 304.

¹⁰⁹² McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁹³ Wood, William Basil. “La Grange College, At Florence.” *Nashville Advertiser*. Quoted in Deems, Charles Force Deems, [*Annals of Southern Methodism*](#). 1856, p. 157.

headmaster of the Preparatory School; Rev. Bennett Battle Ross who would briefly fill the professorship of Mixed Mathematics, and Rev. Thomas P. Hatch who would teach of Chemistry and Geology for an even shorter spell. Oscar Fitzaland Casey took over Ancient Languages although he was also proficient in mathematics and helped Rice in that area. Septimus had the added duty of the preparatory school headship as Thomas R. Smith, La Grange preparatory head elected to remain on the mountain with Edwin Goodwin, the head of Ancient Languages.

But the turnover was frequent on the faculty. In haste, Rivers and the trustees would tend to look opportunistically at La Grange graduates or others nearby. By July of 1857, S. De Soto from the Female Synodical College was listed as professor of Ancient and Modern Languages. Oscar Casey elected to move to the new East Alabama Male College in Auburn, chartered in 1856 and likewise affiliated with the Methodist Church, South. Casey would spend a couple of years there, marrying Frances Olivia Frazier, daughter of a wealthy slaveholder. He would move to the newly chartered Southern University in 1859 and remain there until 1876 when fiscal tribulations at the college again forced his relocation.¹⁰⁹⁴

In those years before the war, the faculty changed over often. Thomas P. Hatch died in 1855, almost immediately upon arrival in Florence, and if the 1857 advertisement in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* is accurate, his duties were assumed by La Grange graduate, Florence attorney, and Florence Wesleyan trustee, [Henry Cox Jones](#) (1821-1913).¹⁰⁹⁵

Rev. Bennett Battle Ross left Florence Wesleyan to fill a series of church ministries in Talladega, Tuskegee, Huntsville and Mobile before re-entering higher education at Alabama Polytechnic (the successor to Alabama Male College) in 1872. The ever flexible Septimus Rice took his role in Mixed Mathematics and Preparatory assistant Norman Briggs stepped into Rice's Pure Mathematics responsibilities. A successful attorney and Franklin County industrialist, Henry Cox Jones was not around long in the Natural Sciences role, as in 1859, Norman Briggs was teaching

¹⁰⁹⁴ Vaughn, Gerald F, "[Allen S. Andrews, Oscar F. Casey, and the Rise and Fall of Southern University in the Late Nineteenth Century](#)," *Methodist history*. Year: 2006, Volume: 45, Issue: 1, pp. 54-55.

¹⁰⁹⁵ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 54.

chemistry, mineralogy, and geology.¹⁰⁹⁶ It may be that the indefatigable Rice picked up all the mathematics duties.

For Florence Wesleyan, the academic year and the curriculum were both continuations of the patterns established the prior years at La Grange. For the commencement gathering of July 1856, there were orations by the Dialectical and Lafayette literary societies and a dozen speeches by students. [Alex Sledge](#) (1835 – 1916), of Spring Hill, Alabama, son of former La Grange trustee, Alexander Sledge, represented the Dialectical Society, with the topic: “There is a Spirit that never Sleeps.” For the Lafayette Society, C. S. W. Price, of South Florence chose: “Mathematics Necessary to Success.” Soon-to-be faculty member Norman F. Briggs gave a rousing defense of “Slavery” in his talk; he would shortly don the Confederate gray and defend that institution with his musket. Other student talks included E. S. Jemison, Talladega: “Walker Expedition;” Benjamin Hicks Malone (1833 – 1885) Athens: “Southern Literature;” G. T. Flewellen, Glenville: “Kansas;” R. W. Foster, Florence: “Man the Emperor of Nature;” P. B. Pride, Tuscumbia: “England: Past, Present, and Future;” J. R. Key, Florence: “Our Splendors;” W. H. Morgan, Somerville, Tennessee: “Internal Improvement;” J. R. Stewart, Florence: “Ideal and Real;” D. C. Love, Canton, Mississippi, “Give us Men – The Times Demand;” Charles Henry Fant of Holly Springs, Mississippi: “Triumphs of the Mind; N. W. Lea, also of Holly Springs, 2nd

¹⁰⁹⁶ Richard C. Sheridan. [Alabama Chemists in the Civil War](#). *Alabama Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 265-274; “Florence Wesleyan University.” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, August 1, 1857, n.p. Photocopy of original. A frequently cited wartime notice (above) attributed to Richard H. reported that “four professors and about one hundred of our students have gone to war,” forcing the cancellation of commencement exercises in 1861; further specified that *Professor Morgan* had become captain of a company raised at Union City, Tennessee, while *Professors Hurt and Forbes* were already serving in Virginia. This notice is preserved through later quotation by Lazenby and cited in William Lindsey McDonald, [Beginnings: Florence and Florence Wesleyan University](#) (Florence, Ala.: p. 42. Professor Briggs, also named by , is independently documented by Sheridan and may therefore be treated as a confirmed individual within this group. By contrast, no surviving catalogues, trustee minutes, payroll records, or denominational rosters have yet been identified that independently confirm the appointments or instructional fields of Morgan, McDonald does indicate in a separate section that Professor Hurt housed students in his home. In contradictory fashion, McDonald lists Forbes as a student at Florence Wesleyan, 1859-60 (p. 76) and as a faculty member, joining the staff in February 1857. River’s report thus remains the sole contemporaneous institutional testimony for these latter figures and is best read as evidence of wartime disruption within the Florence Wesleyan orbit rather than as a definitive faculty list; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 22, Appendix IV.

Honors, delivered the Latin Salutatory and H. T. Sale, Belmonte Alabama, 1st Honor, "Valedictory."¹⁰⁹⁷ Music and sermons filled out the ceremony.

In 1859, a growing Florence Wesleyan added [James Norton Temple](#) (1818-1904) and [William Cummins Ratcliffe](#) (1839-1920) to the faculty. As many before, Temple, an 1840 graduate of Dickinson College, was an ordained Methodist minister. His wife Narcissa was the daughter of [Dr. William McMahon](#) whose name, as agent of the Tennessee Conference, is intimately linked with the history of La Grange College. While teaching at Florence Wesleyan, Temple, his wife and four children lived on the estate of Judge Posey, a preacher at the First Methodist Church and a trustee of the university. Temple also served as preacher for the rural Hopewell Methodist Church during this time. At the outbreak of the war, he left Florence and may have moved to Paducah Kentucky where he was living in 1870.¹⁰⁹⁸

During his very brief tenure, perhaps less than a year, Ratcliffe held the George Washington Foster Chair of Pure Mathematics, perhaps allowing Briggs to assume the chemistry, mineralogy and geology duties. Little more is known of Ratcliffe, other than he held an M. A. degree from the University of Mississippi, fought in the [Sixth Arkansas Regiment](#) and practiced law in Arkansas after the Civil War.¹⁰⁹⁹

In 1859, some trustee positions were rotated. John Edmund Moore, Dr. James W. Stewart, William Basil Wood, Daniel Coleman, Richard H. Reeves, Oscar Casey, Benjamin W. Maclin stepped off the board. J. M. McAlister, Dr. A. H. Jones, [Quintus C. Atkinson](#) (1810-1862), J. G. Leftwich, and William H. Price were appointed.¹¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁹⁷ [Florence Wesleyan University Commencement, July 9, 1856](#). University of Memphis Digital Commons. Accessed December 18, 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁸ ["James Norton Temple."](#) *Family Search*. Online. Accessed December 21, 2025; [Encyclopedia Dickinsonia: Dickinson College Alumni, 1826-1850](#). Online. Accessed December 21, 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 30; ["William Cummins Ratcliffe."](#) *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed December 21, 2025.

¹¹⁰⁰ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 31.

Florence Wesleyan and the Coming of War

As the antebellum years drew to an ominous close, Florence, Alabama, no longer resembled the raw frontier village that had emerged in the 1820s along the shoals of the Tennessee River. Yet the region retained a distinctly frontier political culture, shaped by land speculation, river commerce, and the pragmatic alliances of a population whose social networks faced north and east as readily as south. Florence merchants traded up the river into East Tennessee and Kentucky; its educators and ministers came disproportionately from Virginia, the Carolinas, and New England colleges; and its civic elites maintained a pragmatic Whig conservatism long after the national Whig Party had collapsed. Still, the years between 1855 and 1861 witnessed a decisive transformation. The Tennessee Valley entered the national crisis not as a settled backwater but as a peripheral frontier region caught between competing ideological currents—Unionist traditions, evangelical discipline, sectional grievance, and an escalating sense that *war was not merely possible but increasingly inevitable*.¹¹⁰¹

The general atmosphere bears influenced a not-so-subtle wartime shift at Florence Wesleyan University's. The College, its trustees, and its students lived through six years in which political options narrowed, and the possibility of a peaceful sectional settlement receded. The intellectual and ecclesiastical worlds that had nourished LaGrange College's founding in 1830—moderate Methodism, Whig paternalism, and a confidence in upward mobility through education—had grown strained by 1860. In their place emerged sharper polemics: theological defense of slavery (President Richard Henderson Rivers among them), political suspicion of the North, and a local culture more attuned to rumors of secession conventions than to debates about classical curricula. Understanding Florence's internal climate in 1855–61 is essential to grasping why the College's trustees, in November 1861, turned noticeably toward military discipline as a tool of survival.

Florence of the 1830s–40s had been a [Whig stronghold](#)—committed to river improvement schemes, professional education, commercial modernization, and denominational schools. By 1855, however, the old

¹¹⁰¹ Olsen, Christopher. [Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860](#). London: Oxford, 2000, chs. 2–3; though focused on Mississippi, the Whig frontier dynamics are strongly parallel to North Alabama's.

Whig coalition had splintered. Many merchants and planters shifted uneasily between the new [American \(Know-Nothing\) Party](#) and a reconstituted Democratic faction increasingly sympathetic to Southern Rights ideology.¹¹⁰²

The economic shocks of the [Panic of 1857](#) hit the Tennessee Valley hard. Cotton prices collapsed and credit tightened, especially for the smaller planters and merchants surrounding Florence.¹¹⁰³ In similar frontier regions across the South, historians have noted that economic downturns often sharpened sectional rhetoric: national banks, Northern carriers, and federal tariff policies were blamed for local hardship.¹¹⁰⁴ Florence was no exception.

The *Florence Gazette* and the *North Alabamian* joined a broader statewide shift in the late 1850s, as Southern newspapers adopted increasingly sectional language and warned that economic dependence on Northern manufacturing and commerce threatened the region's autonomy. Local political discourse in Florence echoed this rising urgency. Frontier political culture—grounded in courthouse-square debate, personal loyalty networks, and extemporaneous oratory—proved especially vulnerable to the emotional mobilization that followed [John Brown's raid](#) in October 1859. [Lincoln's election](#) only added fuel to the fires. Public meetings, reported in the Valley press, cast the new Republican administration not merely as a constitutional danger but as a direct threat to the social and racial order of the Tennessee Valley.¹¹⁰⁵

Rumor, always potent in frontier communities, carried exaggerated tales of Northern abolitionist plots, slave uprisings, and coercive federal

¹¹⁰² Wiggins, Sarah Woolfolk. [The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865–1881](#) (U. Alabama Press, 1977), 3–6, on the persistence of Whig elites.

¹¹⁰³ Woodman, Harold D. [King Cotton and His Retainers](#) (Lexington, 1968), 181–84

¹¹⁰⁴ Huston, James L. "[The Panic of 1857, Southern Economic Thought, and the Patriarchal Defense of Slavery.](#)" *Civil War History* 50, no. 3 (2004): 219–246.

¹¹⁰⁵ Walter Lynwood Fleming, [Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama.](#) New York: Macmillan, 1905, p. 57, noting that Southern newspapers for decades had agitated sectional economic themes and warned against Northern dependence; see also William Warren Rogers et al., [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#), 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018), pp.161–73, on escalating press rhetoric and political mobilization in 1859–60; and Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, [The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865–1881](#) (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977), esp. 3–8, for contextual analysis of Alabama's prewar political culture and the role of newspapers and public meetings in shaping public sentiment. Contemporary southern chroniclers who lived through the war, Saunders and Wyeth, harbored their animus toward John Brown and the abolitionists until their own passing.

influence in border states. This shift eroded the older Whig-Methodist synthesis that had defined LaGrange and early Florence Wesleyan: a culture confident that education and denominational order could offset the region's volatility. By 1859 that harmony was increasingly fragile.¹¹⁰⁶

And at Florence Wesleyan, personal circumstance may have rendered the situation even more fragile. In 1860, President Richard Henderson Rivers, enroute to the Sunday dedication of a church, was thrown from a carriage, dragged alongside the driverless buggy. His leg crushed and an arm broken, the President was left largely incapacitated. He lived in physical pain the rest of his life. Although neither Clark nor McDonald supplies a precise date, the accident appears to have preceded by only a short interval Rivers' withdrawal from Florence Wesleyan and his subsequent assumption of leadership at a female school. His impaired condition likely hastened a transition already fraught with institutional strain, leaving the college, amid sectional agitation, in the hands of a successor ill-prepared for the moment.¹¹⁰⁷

The Intellectualization of Crisis.

Within this environment, Methodist and Baptist institutions played a powerful role in shaping public sentiment. Frontier Methodism—deeply woven into Florence life—had before the schism been a stabilizing force. But by the late 1850s the Southern Methodist Church was increasingly involved in defending slavery as a biblical institution. Works like President River's *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1859) provided intellectual

¹¹⁰⁶ On the circulation of rumor, abolitionist scares, and the intensification of sectional fears in Alabama during the late 1850s, see William Warren Rogers et al., [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#), 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018), 161–73. On the long-standing sectional agitation of Southern newspapers and their role in framing Northern economic and political power as threatening, see Walter Lynwood Fleming, [Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama](#) (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 57. For the erosion of antebellum Whig intellectual confidence, and the increasingly defensive and ideologically charged tone of Southern collegiate and literary rhetoric on the eve of the war, see Alfred L. Brophy, "'The Law of the Descent of Thought': Law, History, and Civilization in Antebellum Literary Addresses," *Law and Literature* 20, no. 3 (2008): 343–402.

¹¹⁰⁷ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 167; Person, Nell. *Life of Richard Henderson*. Research in the History of Southern Education, 1933, p.17; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 39.

legitimation for the social system and framed slavery as divinely ordained and morally protective.¹¹⁰⁸

Colleges such as LaGrange (before its fire in 1863), Centenary, Howard, and Southern University became nodes in a *denominational network that mingled theological certainty with sectional anxiety*. Ministers traveling circuits through the Valley preached sermons warning of Northern aggression; college presidents and trustees spoke at barbecues and public meetings; students themselves became participants in “Young Men’s Southern Rights Clubs,” which proliferated after John Brown’s raid in 1859. The emotional aftershocks of Harpers Ferry reverberated strongly in Florence, where sentiments fairly reflected the view of the *Petersburg Express*:

The Harpers Ferry affair was but premature fruit. A whole harvest of sterner rebellion and deadlier collision is growing up and ripening from the seed these men have sown.

Disguise it as we may, large portions of the North are our enemies—more bitter, more deadly hostile than through hereditary enmity had pitched their opposing hosts on a hundred battlefields. The spirit of the effort to wrest Kansas from slavery, made by the concert of a party which polled more than a million votes at the last Presidential election, is manifest enough from the dead and captured agents for the bloody design at Harpers Ferry. Had one of the men of the irresponsible conflict school occupied the Presidency in the last five days, who can tell the bloody news which would, at this instant, be ringing through the land?

*Unless a change—a speedy and effectual change—sweep over northern society, the great conflict must come.*¹¹⁰⁹

These developments infused even academic life with a pervasive sense of crisis. Contemporary observers repeatedly noted that students at Southern colleges debated secession as a daily topic, tracked events in Kansas and Virginia with intense interest, and increasingly framed national politics in terms of impending conflict rather than constitutional compromise. William Warren Rogers and Michael Holt both document that by 1859–60 college-aged men across Alabama and the Lower South spoke openly of war as a likely outcome of Republican ascendancy, while faculty and trustees struggled to restrain the politicization of campus life. In this

¹¹⁰⁸, Richard Henderson. [*Elements of Moral Philosophy*](#). Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859. See p. 221 and elsewhere.

¹¹⁰⁹ [Editorial](#) *The Petersburg Express*, October 25, 1859.

atmosphere, the idea of armed collision entered the intellectual bloodstream of the frontier elite well before the first shots were fired, reshaping how institutions such as Florence Wesleyan understood their educational mission and their responsibility to discipline and retain young men on the eve of war.¹¹¹⁰

South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860. Alabama seceded on January 11, 1861, in the same month as Mississippi, Georgia and Louisiana. College-age men in Florence and the surrounding counties faced intense pressures in the secession winter and early spring of 1861. The local press reported the organization and departure of volunteer companies—most notably the “Florence Guards,” which left Florence on April 1, 1861, just days before Fort Sumter—and printed the kinds of company rosters and organizational notices that accompanied the early rush to arms.¹¹¹¹ Students at Florence Wesleyan and at preparatory academies in Lauderdale and Colbert Counties routinely attended these militia events. Some colleges in the region—notably LaGrange Military Academy up on the mountain—had already embraced military structure, and their example seeped into the consciousness of civilians.

Faculty and trustees across the South noted a rising problem: students were aware of the approaching conflict, approved secession and wished to join the fight. At the University of Virginia, for example, faculty chairman Socrates Maupin noted in his diary that students on March 16, 1861, broke into the Rotunda and planted the Confederate flag on the dome. Professor of Mathematics Albert Taylor Bledsoe, himself an avid secessionist, finally persuaded the students to remove that flag until Virginia officially seceded – which it did on April 17, five days after the

¹¹¹⁰ William Warren Rogers et al., [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#), 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018), 161–73, documenting the politicization of public discourse and the growing expectation of war among young men in Alabama by 1859–60; Michael F. Holt, [The Political Crisis of the 1850s](#) (New York: Wiley, 1978), 267–86, on the collapse of compromise politics and the widespread belief, especially among younger Southerners, that sectional conflict had become unavoidable; See also Alfred L. Brophy, “‘[The Law of the Descent of Thought](#)’: Law, History, and Civilization in Antebellum Literary Addresses,” *Law and Literature* 20, no. 3 (2008): 343–402, on the increasing politicization of collegiate rhetoric and the erosion of Whig confidence in education as a stabilizing force.

¹¹¹¹ “[Florence Guards](#)” Source: *Florence Gazette*, Wednesday, April 10, 1861, page 2. LauderdaleALGenWeb.com <https://www.lauderdalealgenweb.com/florence-guards>. Accessed December 19, 2025

shelling of Ft. Sumter.¹¹¹² At South Carolina, 106 of the 143 students were enrolled in a cadet company.¹¹¹³

Southern Colleges on the Eve of War

The anticipation of secession and war precipitated a profound transformation in the culture, governance, and daily regimen of Southern colleges. Over the decades, as the fissures between North and South widened, the tensions were evident in higher education as they were in religion and politics. Pressures grew to keep Southern college aged students in the region; textbooks were censored and replaced; faculty whose sympathies were suspect were driven from their jobs.¹¹¹⁴ When the war began, Yale was the largest college in the nation, with 502 students and 21 faculty; but many southern colleges were competitive with their northern counterparts in numbers. The University of Virginia boasted over 400 hundred students and 14 professors; North Carolina enrolled 450 students and employed 14 teachers. The University of Alabama had 120 students, the University of Mississippi 140, and Emory about 125.¹¹¹⁵

Although the antebellum South possessed a long tradition of military schooling—extending from the founding of the [Virginia Military Institute](#) (1839) and the [Citadel Academy](#) in Charleston (1842) to the proliferation of smaller academies modeled on West Point—most denominational and private institutions entered the 1860s as resolutely civilian bodies. Their faculty were ministers, lawyers, and classicists; their curricula bore the imprint of the antebellum classical college; their boards operated on the assumption that gentlemanly restraint, not martial discipline, governed the behavior of their students. These schools were not improvisational. They reflected decades of institutional development and the explicit preference, among several Southern legislatures, for academies capable of supplying

¹¹¹² [“University of Virginia During the Civil War. Student Participation.”](#) *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Online. Accessed December 19, 2025

¹¹¹³ Flynt, J. Wayne. [“Southern Higher Education and the Civil War.”](#) *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), p. 211.

¹¹¹⁴ Christenberry, Daniel P. [The Semi-Centennial History of the Southern University, 1856 – 1906](#). Greensboro: D. P. Christenberry, 1908, p. 26; Vaughn, Gerald F. [“Teaching Moral Philosophy in the South During Slavery and Reconstruction: Edward Wadsworth of LaGrange College and Southern University.”](#) *Methodist History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 2008). P. 184.

¹¹¹⁵ Flynt, J. Wayne. [“Southern Higher Education and the Civil War.”](#) *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), p. 214..

militia officers and public engineers. As Rod Andrew Jr. has shown, Southern military schools before the Civil War were conceived not merely as training grounds for officers, but as institutions intended to instill discipline, honor, and civic leadership in a regional elite, blending classical education with martial values¹¹¹⁶ Their wartime transformation was thus largely a matter of *intensification*, not reinvention.

Within a span of months after secession, a broader regional pattern took shape: Southern schools faced hemorrhaging enrollments as students abandoned coursework and enlisted *en masse* in hastily formed volunteer companies. In response, dozens of colleges adopted a distinctive form of *wartime militarization*, a phenomenon that may be understood under three broad headings: (1) the *continuation* of pre-existing military academies; (2) the *conversion* of certain universities into formal corps of cadets; and (3) the *adaptation* of denominational colleges into *hybrid civilian-military institutions* whose primary aim was neither professional officer training nor ideological militarism, but rather *student retention and institutional survival*. This third category most closely describes Florence Wesleyan University in 1861, whose appointment of George Meredith Peek as professor of mathematics and superintendent of military training aligns with these hybrid practices across the region.

Alabama would follow the second path, when the remnants of the school on the mountain would be converted from a classical studies program into La Grange College and Military Academy. After a halting start, the trustees of La Grange had adopted the full apparatus of martial discipline: uniforms, barracks life, graded ranks, daily drill, and a curriculum explicitly oriented toward engineering, artillery, and the science of fortification.¹¹¹⁷ In 1858 the Alabama Legislature rechartered LaGrange as *LaGrange College and Military Academy*, subsidizing a corps of “state cadets” whose tuition derived from public funds.¹¹¹⁸ When war began, nearly half of its 171 students were enrolled under the cadet system. The

¹¹¹⁶ Andrew, Rod. [*The Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915*](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp. 3-32.

¹¹¹⁷ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 10

¹¹¹⁸ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 10;

Academy suspended academic operations in 1862 when its corps enlisted nearly *en bloc* in Confederate service.¹¹¹⁹

Similarly, in February 1860, by an act of the Alabama legislature, the University of Alabama was converted into a military college. In part, the conversion reflected the determination of President Garland to curb the violence and restiveness of the student body that had plagued the university from the beginning, and in part demonstrated a readiness on the part of the legislature to address the looming likelihood of conflict over the issue of slavery.¹¹²⁰ The university produced seven generals, 25 colonels and countless other officers to serve the confederacy, and over 300 university cadets were present to confront the 1865 Union cavalry raid.¹¹²¹ While a great number of university students joined the exodus, many others in the cadet corps were detailed by the governor to remain; by using the campus as a training ground, and the cadets to train companies readying for conflict, enrollment was maintained at a fairly strong count.¹¹²²

Neither of these tracks explains the transformation of Florence Wesleyan, which had no prior martial character and no legislative mandate to train officers. Without legislative action, Florence Wesleyan, in the haze of approaching conflict, assumed a military countenance—perhaps at trustee initiative. While there are no extant trustee records to affirm the move, McDonald’s observation that faculty member Ashley Hurt commanded one of two university guard units that departed for Confederate service immediately after Fort Sumter suggests Florence Wesleyan had already developed organized student military companies by the spring of 1861. These units appear to have preceded the formal appointment of George M. Peek as commandant later that year, indicating that the trustees’ November 1861 action was an effort to institutionalize and regularize an existing martial culture rather than to introduce military

¹¹¹⁹ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, pp.91-98.

¹¹²⁰ Sellers, James Benson. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902.

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 253-280; Cohen, Michael David.

[Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#).

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p.37.

¹¹²¹ [“Crimson Tide Battalion,”](#) *University of Alabama*. Online. Accessed December 30, 2025; Barkley, Terry. [Twilight of the Confederacy: The Alabama Corps of Cadets and the Burning of the University of Alabama](#). Birmingham: Blue Rooster Press, 2022.

¹¹²² Flynt, J. Wayne. [“Southern Higher Education and the Civil War.”](#) *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), p. 215.

training de novo.¹¹²³ Perhaps, as was the case at competitor Southern University, student military units were encouraged to keep students on campus rather than returning home to join militias or formative Confederate units. On the Greensboro campus, 77 students joined the student military guards in the fall of 1860, with a third of them leaving at the end of the school year.¹¹²⁴

Lawrence Sullivan Ross (1838-1898) was one of the students on the Florence Wesleyan campus on the eve of war, donning the Confederate gray to sustain slavery in his native Texas and the other secessionist states. “Sul” Ross was a 4th generation frontiersman, his grandfather and father living in Iowa and Missouri before the latter took up a homestead in the Texas Robertson colony. His great grandfather had been taken as a youth by Cherokee during a raid on remote Virginia school and spent years as a captive. The family moved to Austin in 1845 in order to educate Sul and his siblings, and by 1850 the family was living farmland near Waco, where his father also operated a hotel and a ferry across the Brazos River. To further his education, Ross, older than most of the other students enrolled in the preparatory school of Baylor College, graduating from there in 1857.¹¹²⁵



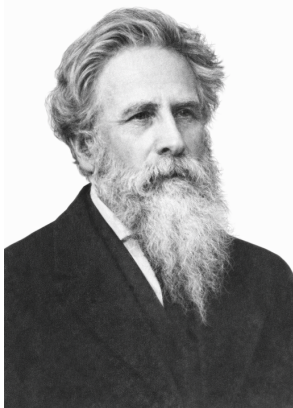
83 Lawrence Sullivan Ross

Lawrence Sullivan Ross’s decision to attend Florence Wesleyan University was not an isolated or purely individual choice, but one shaped by the transmission of insitutional memory carried westward by prominent Alabama families who had settled in Waco in the 1850s. Among Ross’s contemporaries at Florence Wesleyan were [John Wesley Downs](#) (1838-1917), [Oscar Jackson Downs](#) (1840-1876) and [Davis Roberts Gurley](#) (1836-1914), all closely tied to North Alabama’s Methodist educational world.

¹¹²³ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 34.

¹¹²⁴ Flynt, J. Wayne. “[Southern Higher Education and the Civil War](#).” *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), p. 214.

¹¹²⁵ Benner, Judith Ann. [Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983



84 Septimus Rice

Their fathers, [William Wood Downs](#) and [Davis R. Gurley](#), had been legislatively appointed trustees of La Grange College, placing them within the formal governance structure of the institution that Florence Wesleyan essentially became. These men did not merely *know* of La Grange; they had helped direct it. When they later migrated to Texas, they carried with them confidence in a college they regarded as tested, respectable, and suitable for the education of their sons. Florence Wesleyan was one of the formative settings in which Ross encountered ordered collegiate governance, discipline, and peer networks rooted in the antebellum Methodist south, an experience that helps illuminate his later aptitude as governor of Texas and president of Texas A&M University.¹¹²⁶

Ross almost failed to matriculate as a student. Arriving in Florence with only the money for tuition and one month's room and board, he appeared before the President and faculty and was initially found to be ineligible for admission because of his deficiencies in mathematics. Informed that he would have to spend a remedial year in preparatory school to, Sul Ross turned to leave, informing the examining board that he would rather return to Texas to complete his studies. It was then that Septimus Rice, professor of mathematics and head of the preparatory school made what may have been the most significant gesture of his lengthy tenure with the school. Asking him to return to the room, Rice told the disappointed young Texan that if he were willing to board at his house, he would tutor Ross in mathematics at night and he would be able to progress with his classmates. Ross accepted the offer, sold his steed, saddle, and bridle and became a student at Florence Wesleyan University.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²⁶ *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama*. Approved 14 January 1850 [No. 175] "[An Act to Amend an act entitled "An Act to Establish La Grange College; ""William Wood Downs \(1802-1882\)", Wiki tree](#). Online. Accessed January 4, 2026. Woods and family had moved to Waco from Leighton in 1854 in a massive train of 100 wagons along with other migrants; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 45.

¹¹²⁷ Benner, Judith Ann. [Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, p. 26. McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 26-27.

In addition to the academic preparation, his biographer suggests Ross's time among the professional, mercantile and planter elite of Florence and the surrounding region developed the rugged young frontiersman socially. "It is probable," wrote Judith Ann Benner, "that his association with the refined society and gentlemen's sons during this period taught him the gentlemanly address and knightly courtesy for which he was later noted."¹¹²⁸ It is unclear that Ross himself ever owned an enslaved person in his own right, but his father, Shapley, with his farm, ferry and hotel operations owned as many as seven.¹¹²⁹ Benner writes that Sul Ros became a true Southerner "by associations, training and convictions," and fervently embraced the southern notion of "states rights."¹¹³⁰

Obtaining his degree in 1859 he seemed to set his sights on a military degree and state service. His initial preparations on that course of action came while he was still enrolled at Florence Wesleyan, when during the summer of his junior year, 1858, he signed up with the U.S. Army to lead a band of tribal auxiliaries from the Brazos Indian Reservation where his father served as an agent. From the summer through October, their focus was a campaign against marauding Comanche in Indian Territory. A fierce battle near current day Rush Springs, Oklahoma nearly killed Ross, and he was tended in the field for five days, too seriously injured to be moved; it was fully a month before he could return back to Waco, where he regained strength under the watchful eye of his mother. His leadership earning him an offer from General Winfield Scott to secure an army appointment and a military career. Instead, he resolved to return to Florence Wesleyan to complete the remaining courses needed for his degree. Nevertheless, his efforts had been lionized in the Texas press, and his unit's work with the Second Cavalry would serve him well. Four of the army officers with whom he worked on that joint expedition -- Earl Van Dorn, Nathan G. Evans, James P. Major and Charles W. Phifer -- would also become Confederate generals during the war.¹¹³¹

¹¹²⁸ Benner, Judith Ann. [*Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator*](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, p. 30.

¹¹²⁹ "United States, Census, 1860", [FamilySearch](#) Entry for S P Ross and C H Ross, 1860.)

¹¹³⁰ Benner, Judith Ann. [*Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator*](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, p. 31.

¹¹³¹ Benner, Judith Ann. [*Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator*](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, pp. 30-47; Benner, Judith Ann. "[Lawrence Sullivan Ross: Soldier,](#)

After graduation, he returned to Texas where he continued to recuperate from his injuries the year before, becoming engaged to Elizabeth Dorothy Tinsley, daughter of a neighboring planter, and adopting the little white child his forces had rescued from the Comanche the year before. He named her Lizzie Ross as an affectionate gesture to his fiancée.¹¹³² With the frontier ablaze in clashes between Texans and Comanche, Sul Ross joined the Texas Rangers. In 1860, he answered the call from Governor Sam Houston to "raise a sufficient number of mounted rangers to repel, pursue, and punish" the warring tribes, joining the Waco company of the Rangers as a first lieutenant.¹¹³³ In that year, Ross led Rangers in the Battle of Pease River against chief Nocona and his Comanche forces, "rescuing" [Cynthia Ann Parker](#) who had been taken by the Comanche as a child, had married Nocona, and had three children with him. Her recovery added to Ross's celebrity.¹¹³⁴

When Texas joined the confederacy, Lawrence Sullivan Ross left the Rangers, despite Houston's best efforts to keep him on the frontier, and became an officer in the confederate army. By September he was a major in the [Sixth Texas Cavalry](#) and was promoted to colonel the next year. He fought in more than 100 battles and became one of the youngest generals in its ranks. After the war, he built up his ranch and served one term as a state senator. In 1887 he became the 19th governor of Texas, serving two terms. Leaving office, he became President of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University) building the school from a modest and precarious institution to a position of prominence and leadership in Texas and the nation. After his death in 1898, the legislature created [Sul Ross University](#) in his memory.¹¹³⁵ In the

[Statesman, and University President](#)". *Texas State Historical Society. TSHA Online*. Published 1976; Revised by Emma Pask, November 8, 2023. Accessed January 6, 2026.

¹¹³² Benner, Judith Ann. [Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, pp. 30-53.

¹¹³³ Benner, Judith Ann. [Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, p. 31.

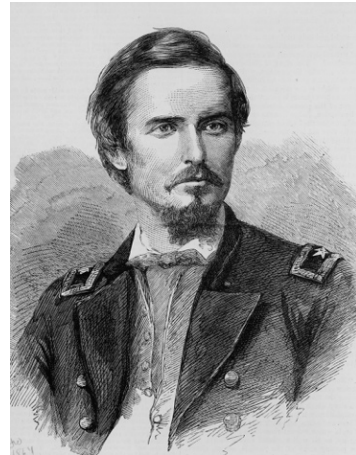
¹¹³⁴ Ricardson, Rupert N. "[The Death of Nocona and the Recovery of Cynthia Ann Parker](#)." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (July 1942), pp. 15-21.; "Lawrence Sullivan Ross." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026.

¹¹³⁵ "Lawrence Sullivan Ross." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026.

words of William Lindsey McDonald, Lawrence Sullivan Ross was almost certainly the most celebrated alumnus of Florence Wesleyan University.¹¹³⁶

Daniel McCook Jr. (1834-1864) was a contemporary of Lawrence Sullivan Ross on the Florence Wesleyan campus, graduating in 1858. After graduation he studied law in Ohio, and became a law partner of William Tecumseh Sherman and his foster brothers, [Hugh Boyle Ewing](#) and [Thomas Ewing, Jr.](#), in Kansas, joining the Union army upon the outbreak of hostilities. He accepted the commission of Captain in the 1st Kansas Volunteer Regiment in June 1861, fighting his first battle at Wilson's Creek, Missouri, where he solidified his reputation as a brave commander. Subsequently, McCook would serve as a brigade commander in the battalion commanded by his law partner Sherman.¹¹³⁷ Like Sherman and his two foster brothers, Daniel McCook would rise to the rank of general.¹¹³⁸

Daniel McCook, Jr. hailed from Ohio, and his choice of Florence Wesleyan for his education is perhaps more quixotic than Lawrence Sullivan Ross's. The family of his father, Daniel, and his uncle, John, earned the belligerent sobriquet, "[The Fighting McCooks](#)," lending more soldiers to the union cause than any other. Daniel and nine of his sons wore the uniform during the Civil War; John and five of his sons did the same. Daniel Sr. and three of his sons would die in battle; John and his sons survived the war. Two other brothers and one of their sons served the union army as physicians.¹¹³⁹



84 1Daniel McCook Jr.

Weeks after Fort Sumter, Daniel McCook was commissioned as a captain in the Shield Grays, an infantry company in Leavenworth, where he practiced law. The Grays were incorporated into the 1st Kansas Infantry

¹¹³⁶ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 26-27.

¹¹³⁷ "BG Daniel McCook, Jr." *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026

¹¹³⁸ James P. Boyd. [The Life of William Tecumseh Sherman.](#) Publisher's Union, 1891, p. 17; "[William Tecumseh Sherman,](#)" *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 4, 2026; William Lindsey McDonald. *A Walk Through the Past: People and Places of Florence and Lauderdale County, Alabama.* Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing. 2003, p. 71.

¹¹³⁹ "[The Fighting McCooks were the Civil War's Largest Military Family.](#)" *We Are the Mighty*. Online. Updated February 1, 2022. Accessed January 4, 2026

which suffered heavy casualties in the first major battle of the trans-Mississippi theater of the war, Wilson's Creek, near Springfield, Missouri in August. Shortly afterwards, his brother, Brigadier General Alfred McCook brought him to the 2nd Division Volunteers of the Army of Ohio as an Assistant Adjutant General, fighting in several engagements through Tennessee prior to the month-long [siege of Corinth](#) in April, 1862 which resulted in the Union seizure of the town and the junction of two vital rail lines.¹¹⁴⁰ The chaos and carnage of Shiloh and Corinth featured dozens of combatants from La Grange and Florence Wesleyan. Included among their number were McCook on the one side, and his Florence Wesleyan roommate, [Davis Robert Gurley](#) and classmate Lawrence Sullivan Ross. Gurley had entered the war as a lieutenant in the 6th Texas Cavalry, Company G. When Ross became a colonel in the regiment, he made his classmate an adjutant on his staff. There is no evidence that the classmates encountered each other in the massive theater, but Ross was singled out for his distinguished valor by General Maury, leading to his own subsequent promotion to brigadier general. Gurley himself was awarded the role of adjutant general in Ross's brigade, with an eventual promotion to major.¹¹⁴¹ Daniel McCook was asked by the Governor of Ohio, [David Tod](#), to recruit soldiers for the newly formed 52nd Ohio infantry, and in July he was appointed colonel of the new regiment.¹¹⁴²

Daniel was active in the Army of the Cumberland in 1862-1863, engaging in significant battles at [Stone's River](#), [Perryville](#), and [Chickamauga](#). It was a time of rugged news for Daniel McCook. On August 6, 1862 his

¹¹⁴⁰ McCormick, Arley. "Brigadier General Daniel McCook, Jr.: "Colonel Dan of the Tribe of Dan." [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 51-57. See also: "Siege of Corinth," *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 8, 2026.

¹¹⁴¹ Walkup, David S. "[Davis R. Gurley: Confederate Officer and Texas Adjutant General](#)." *Handbook of Texas*. Texas State Historical Association. Online. First published 1952; updated 1995. Accessed January 8, 2026; Benner, Judith Ann. [Sul Ross: Soldier, Statesman, Educator](#). College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983, p. 121. Another of Gurley and Ross's Florence Wesleyan classmates hailing from Waco, [John Wesley Downs](#), was also at Corinth. Joining the Confederate army at the outbreak of war, he fought at Corinth and in an infantry charge suffered a severe hip wound that left him disabled the remainder of his life (McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 61-62).

¹¹⁴² McCormick, Arley. "Brigadier General Daniel McCook, Jr.: "Colonel Dan of the Tribe of Dan." [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 51-57.

brother Brigadier General [Robert Latimer McCook](#) (1827-1862) was killed by partisan rebel units near Huntsville, Alabama, under circumstances that provoked a loud outcry.¹¹⁴³ His killer, Frank Ballou Gurley, apparently not related to Daniel's former Florence Wesleyan roommate of the same surname, narrowly evaded death by hanging.¹¹⁴⁴ In July 1863, he received the news of the death of his father, [Daniel McCook, Sr.](#) (1798-1863) at the [Battle of Buffington Island](#). To make matters worse, his brother [General Alexander McCook](#) (1831-1903), after poor showings by his unit at Stone's River and [Perryville](#), was in the aftermath of Chickamauga relieved of command and subjected to a court of inquiry that found he did not act appropriately during the battle.¹¹⁴⁵

He may not have known that in April of that year, his law partner William Tecumseh Sherman had encamped his troops on the grounds of Florence Wesleyan University. Sherman established his headquarters in Wesleyan Hall, sharing that space with the University president. That presence of the general officer may have saved the college and the city for the chaos and devastation other Union units were visiting upon the region. The general made his office in the library while his troops used the white fencing surrounding the campus for their cookfires. Perhaps he knew of the college and the town from his time with McCook before the war; perhaps he was impressed by the regal stature of Wesleyan itself, or by the imposing bearing of its president, [Robert A. Young](#) (1824-1902). For whatever the reasons, General Sherman delivered to Young a document intended to protect the university, its property, and its faculty from General Dodge's union forces that would flow into Florence after his departure. The depredations of the Missouri cavalry unit, "The Destroying Angels" under Florence Cornyn's command were already notorious.¹¹⁴⁶ Florence Wesleyan

¹¹⁴³ Sanders, Stuart W. ["The Death of General Robert McCook."](#) *Warfare History Network*. Online. Accessed January 9, 2026.

¹¹⁴⁴ Reeves, Marjorie Ann. ["Captain Frank Ballou Gurley."](#) *Tennessee Valley Civil War Roundtable*. Online. Accessed January 9, 2026.

¹¹⁴⁵ Sesser, David. ["Alexander Daniel McCook."](#) *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*. Online. Accessed January 9, 2026

¹¹⁴⁶ Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, p. 81; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 46. According to Faye Axford in [Limestone Legacy](#), (Vol. 23, No. 1), p. 4, McDonald lent credence to McCook's influence in preserving Florence.

would survive, even as La Grange and the University of Alabama were torched by mounted cavalry.

As Sherman marched the Army of the Cumberland toward Atlanta, General Johnson arrayed the Army of Tennessee across Kennesaw mountain to stop him. His largest frontal assault of the war, on June 27, 1864, ended in tactical defeat; Sherman lost about 3,000 soldiers, three times Johnson's casualties. Daniel McCook was one of those casualties. Leading his Union veterans against some of the most seasoned soldiers the two confederate generals, Cheatham and Cleburne mustered, he led his forces through the woods and undergrowth atop the defensive parapet. Parrying bayonets with his sword, he was toppled by a musket ball that pierced his chest and his heart, prelude to a lingering death.¹¹⁴⁷ The mortally wounded McCook was moved to his home in Stubenville, Ohio where he died on July 17, 1864, a day after receiving from Secretary Staunton and General Sherman his promotion to brigadier, a recognition to which he could only whisper, "The promotion is too late now."¹¹⁴⁸ Like tens of thousands of other widows, his wife [Julia](#), was left to raise their three-month old child, [Blanche](#), alone, remarrying in 1867.

The War Arrives at Florence Wesleyan

War fever permeated the university and the town before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter. On April 1, 1861, the *Florence Gazette* proclaimed:

¹¹⁴⁷ McCormick, Arley. "Brigadier General Daniel McCook, Jr.: "Colonel Dan of the Tribe of Dan." [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 51-57.

¹¹⁴⁸ Stewart, Nixon B., Rev. [Dan. Cook's Regiment: 52nd O.V.I.: A History of the Regiment, Its Campaigns and Battles From 1862 to 1865](#). Published by the author, 1900, p. 123. "[Brigadier General Daniel McCook, Jr.](#)" *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed January 9, 2026; McCormick, Arley. "Brigadier General Daniel McCook, Jr.: "Colonel Dan of the Tribe of Dan." [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 51-57.

*On Monday, at an early hour, the streets were thronged by the old and young, the rich and poor. Precisely at 10 o'clock, the Guards under command of their gallant **Captain, S. A. M. Wood**, took the line of march for the Hall of the University, accompanied by the Silver Grays, a company of old men... and the University Grays, under the command of **Lieutenant Hurt**... The Hall of the University was packed to its utmost capacity, by the mass of men and women. After the crowd was seated, Dr. Rivers, in a neat and appropriate address, presented in the name of the patriotic women of our patriotic town, a splendid of the Confederate States to the Guards, which was received in patriotic speeches by Captain Wood and Ensign Jones. Three cheers were then given by the guards for the ladies of Florence.*¹¹⁴⁹



The [flag of the regiment](#), perhaps the same one sewn by the Florentines, survived the war and can be found in the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

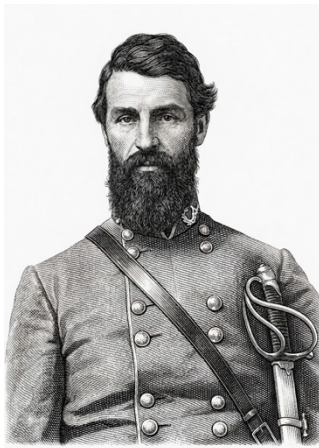


Figure 86. S.A.M. Wood

Sterling Alexander Martin (S.A.M.) Wood (1823-1891), was a Florence attorney and editor of the *Gazette*. A graduate of St. Joseph's College in 1841, he was the son of Mary Ester and Alexander Hamilton Wood, Florence's first mayor. The influential William Basil Wood was his older brother. The Florence Guards mentioned in the article above was the first company formed in Lauderdale County, and with the advent of war would become part of the 7th Alabama Regiment, which Wood commanded, rising to the rank of brigadier.¹¹⁵⁰ Wood's early field service was marked by personal

¹¹⁴⁹ Quoted by McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 40.

¹¹⁵⁰ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, pp. 529-530; McCormick, Arley. "Sterling Alexander Marin Wood," [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 150-158. The ensign is Thomas Allen Jones. A listing of the enrollees in the Florence Guards can be found [here](#).

bravery and physical suffering, dragged by his horse at the [Battle of Shiloh](#), wounded at the [Battle Perryville](#), and present with his troops at the [Battle of Stone's River](#). His record, however, culminated in failure at the [Battle of Chickamauga](#). There at Chickamauga, Wood lost contact with his troops in separate night and day attacks, with more than 750 of his 2000 soldiers killed or wounded. His incompetence earned the criticism of his superiors and, suffering the attribution of cowardice, was allowed to submit his resignation. On October 17, 1863, he left the service. His postwar reputation would survive the debacle. Opening a law office in Tuscaloosa, he became a staff attorney for the Alabama Great Southern Railway, served in the state legislature, and taught law at the University of Alabama. He died there in 1891.¹¹⁵¹ His survival in public memory as a respectable jurist and educator illustrates the degree to which postwar civic success could eclipse wartime failure—particularly for members of the antebellum professional elite.

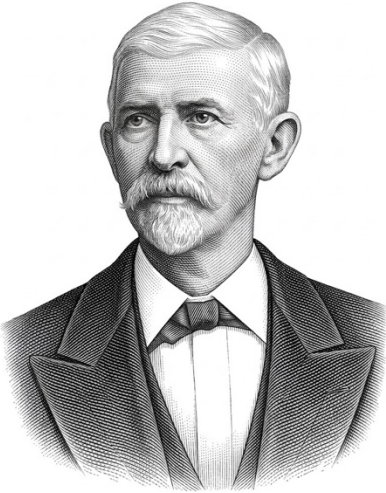
William Basil Wood (1820-1891), trustee, mercantilist, attorney and jurist, was as we have seen another member of the Florence elite. Along with Septimus Rice, he may have done more to shape and sustain Florence Wesleyan University than all others. With the advent of war, however, his task was to raise a regiment and take it into battle to preserve the Southern culture. In August 1861, he organized in Courtland the 16th Alabama Infantry regiment, was elected its colonel, and commanded it effectively for nearly two years. Containing almost 900 men from the western counties of the Tennessee Valley, it saw early battles at [Fishing Creek](#), [Shiloh](#) and [Perryville](#). He distinguished himself at [Triune](#) in December 1862 and was recommended by his superiors for promotion to brigadier. But the confederacy had other plans.¹¹⁵² After a near fatal bout with typhoid, William Basil Wood was assigned to General Longstreet's First Corps, Army of Northern Virginia as Presiding Judge of the Military Corps where he

¹¹⁵¹ McCormick, Arley. "Sterling Alexander Marin Wood," [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 150-158.

¹¹⁵² Brewer, Willis. [Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872](#). Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872, p. 546; Bearss, Edwin C. "[Cavalry Operations: Battle of Stone's River](#)." National Park Service. United States Department of the Interior. 1959, p. 4; Linda Larson Aretta. "[William Basil Wood](#)." *Family Search*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026; "16th Regiment, Alabama Infantry." The Civil War. Battle Unit Details. National Park Service. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026

continued until the close of the war. The fortunes of war served him far better than his brother or fellow Florentine Edward Asbury O'Neal.¹¹⁵³

Edward Asbury O'Neal (1818-1890), an early honors graduate of La Grange College, Florence Wesleyan trustee, Alfred's father, and successful Florence attorney also donned the uniform and rose to high command with



87. Edward Asbury O'Neal

less than desirable results. During the fervent debates of the 1850s between anti-slavery factions and the states' rights advocates, O'Neal identified as a staunch secessionist. In July 1861, he departed Florence accompanied by his sons Alfred and Edward Asbury O'Neal Jr. At 43, with standing in his community, Edward was appointed a major in the 9th Alabama Infantry.

O'Neal's early field service was credible, his efforts winning high praise initially. He led his troops through the [Peninsula Campaign](#) retreat, fought well at the [Battle of Seven Pines](#) --where he was severely wounded by shell fragments-- and later earned favorable notice from superiors

for his conduct during the [Chancellorsville Campaign](#) in April-May 1863. By July 1863, he was exercising a brigade-level command within General Robert E. Rodes division, comprised of the 3rd, 5th, 12th and 26th Alabama infantry regiments.¹¹⁵⁴ However, his aspirations to secure the rank of brigadier did not go as well. Joining up with the 26th Alabama and Col. O'Neal before Chancellorsville, George Peek wrote confidentially to his sister of rumors that O'Neal's promotion would not be forthcoming, "Noticing the condition of his regiment, the discipline of his camp, and some reports I hear, I can but think he will not be protected. I express these

¹¹⁵³ McDonald, William Lindsey. [The Civil War Tales of the Tennessee Valley](#). Killen, AL: Heart of Dixie Publishing, 2003.

¹¹⁵⁴ McCormick, Arley. "Edward A. O'Neal of the "Fighting O'Neal's." [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 66-69; "Edward A. O'Neal." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 12, 2026; O'Neal, Edward Asbury. [The Edward Asbury O'Neal Papers, 1833-1908](#). Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Libraries.

things very privately and would not have them repeated for anything...”.

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The [Battle of Gettysburg](#) proved decisive for O’Neal’s military reputation. On 1 July 1863, during the opening assaults north of the town near Oak Ridge, O’Neal failed to coordinate his brigade’s advance with that of Brigadier General Alfred Iverson. Advancing piecemeal and without adequate reconnaissance, O’Neal committed two regiments into a devastating frontal fire delivered at close range by concealed Union infantry behind a stone fence. The repulse not only shattered his attacking regiments within minutes but also exposed Iverson’s brigade to a similarly destructive surprise. The resulting casualties were severe, and the loss of combat power irreparable.

In the aftermath, O’Neal’s judgment came under sustained criticism from senior commanders. General Robert E. Lee, already skeptical of O’Neal’s suitability for higher command, forwarded a previously submitted recommendation for his promotion to brigadier general to President Jefferson Davis with an explicit endorsement that it be denied—a recommendation Davis accepted. Though O’Neal continued to serve the Confederate cause, his field command effectively ended. By the latter part of the war, he had been relieved of regimental leadership and assigned to administrative duties, including the enforcement of conscription and the apprehension of deserters in the Tennessee Valley. At one point he served as commander of the [Andersonville](#) prisoner of war camp, rendered infamous by the [Pulitzer Prize winning study](#) by McKinley Kantor.

O’Neal survived the war, as did his sons Alfred and Emmet, and—like many Confederate veterans—returned to civilian life with remarkable political resilience. He resumed his law practice, served in the Alabama Constitutional Convention, and was elected governor of Alabama, holding office from 1882 to 1886. His son Emmet O’Neal would later continue the family’s political legacy as governor from 1911 to 1915. In the process of postwar reconciliation and commemoration, the debacle at Gettysburg faded from public memory, and Edward, Alfred, and Emmet were celebrated collectively as “the Fighting O’Neals.”¹¹⁵⁶ While O’Neal’s

¹¹⁵⁵ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, n.d. April 1863. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book

¹¹⁵⁶ McCormick, Arley. “Edward A. O’Neal of the “Fighting O’Neal’s.” [North Alabama Civil War Generals: 13 Wore Gray, The Rest Blue](#). *A Selection of Essays by the authors of the Tennessee Valley Round Table*. Undated: after 2007. Online. Accessed January 7, 2026, pp. 69-72; “The

battlefield leadership failed to meet the demands of brigade command, he had served loyally, suffered serious wounds, and emerged from the war with his civic standing intact. Friends and political allies continued to address him as “General”—a courtesy title that endured even in biographical reference works such as the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*.¹¹⁵⁷

Two days after S.A.M. Wood led the Guards through the streets of Florence, the university militia made their appearance:

*The College Grays, a company organized by our college students, and numbering about 50 or 60 strong, and commanded by, we believe, Mr. Alfred M. O’Neal, made their first appearance on the streets, and for the short space of time they have been drilling, they did excellent maneuvering—marching to the word almost as accurately as well-drilled soldiers.*¹¹⁵⁸

Alfred Moore O’Neal (1840-1909) was the son of Edward Asbury O’Neal. He was a student at Florence Wesleyan in the 1859-60 year. The Grays trained as an artillery unit. When the war began, he served at Fort Morgan in Mobile, training a company of sharpshooters. A first lieutenant in the artillery he became ordnance officer for Mobile Bay and chief of artillery under [General Maney](#). In 1864, he led a company of sharpshooters in the Wilderness campaign near Petersburg where he rose to the rank of major. Wounded and captured April 1865, he spent months as a prisoner of war on Johnson’s Island in Lake Erie. He was released in July 1865. Secondary sources and his obituary suggest he was a West Point student, but the evidence is scant. Perhaps he had been accepted but enrollment was interrupted by war, returning to drill his classmates at Florence Wesleyan shortly before the outbreak. He survived the war, his reputation intact, and in 1879, almost 40, he married Tuscumbian Annie Warren. He died in Florence in 1909.¹¹⁵⁹

Battle of Gettysburg. July 1 – The Afternoon’s Battle.” *Civil War Series. National Park Service History*. Online. Accessed January 12, 2026

¹¹⁵⁷ White, J. T. *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. New York: J. T. White, 1900, p.437.

¹¹⁵⁸ Quoted by McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 40.

¹¹⁵⁹ Glass, Debra and Mathews, Heath. [“The Fighting O’Neals.”](#) *Civil War’s Western Theater*. Online. Accessed January 10, 2026. Online. Accessed January 10, 2026; [“Major Alfred Moore O’Neal” Find a Grave](#). Online. Accessed January 10, 2026. Attached photocopy of obituary: “A Gallant Soldier Rests in Beautiful Florence Cemetery;” Florence Arts & Museums, [Alfred Moore](#)

Professor Ashley Davis Hurt (1834-1898) commanded the other guards troop, the *University Grays*. Ashley Hurt brought impeccable credentials to Florence Wesleyan: a University of Virginia graduate as well as the University of Bonn and held the Ph.D. degree from the University of Berlin. He taught ancient languages at Florence Wesleyan during his brief stay. He and his wife [Mary Bruce Johns Hurt](#) (1835-1919) housed several students in their home. When the war started, he joined the Confederate Navy, a path that another Virginia-trained faculty member, George Meridith Peek, would later follow. After the war, he would serve as president of the new Florida Agricultural College in Lake City, and would end his career as chair of Greek, Tulane University. Hurt died in 1898.¹¹⁶⁰

The Lauderdale soldiers and their units began leaving Florence for Mobile and other theaters. On a stormy April 27, Wesleyan Hall auditorium was the scene of another fervent war meeting of townspeople and university students and faculty. Presbyterian minister William H. Mitchell spoke passionately in support of the war effort; his fiery stance from the pulpit would see him arrested by soldiers during an interval of Union occupation. This day, the aged widow of John Coffee was also present, unfurling yet another battle flag to be carried to the front by the zealous youth of the county. Slavery and the southern way must endure. A hundred and eighty six attendees made donations to the war effort, and the leadership called yet another meeting for later in the day, where 92 additional donations were received. The largest donation received was \$250.¹¹⁶¹

Town and university turned to the war effort, with President Richard Henderson Rivers reporting to the Tennessee Methodist Conference:

[O'Neal's Coat](#) (catalog entry no. M.0058), HUB by CatalogIt, accessed January 10, 2026; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 34.

¹¹⁶⁰ Proctor, Samuel. ["An Educator Looks at Florida in 1884: A Letter of Ashley D. Hurt to his Wife."](#) *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 31, No. 3 (January 1953), pp. 208-213; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 71, 77-78; ["Ashley Davis Hurt Papers."](#) University of Florida. Special & Area Studies Collections.

¹¹⁶¹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 33-34.

My Dear Brothers:

*Our college is on war footing. Four professors and about 100 of our students have gone to war. Professor Morgan is captain of the company in Union City. Professors Hurt, Briggs, and Forbes are in Virginia... No commencement exercises this year.*¹¹⁶²

Little solid information exists for [William E. Forbes](#), other than Rivers' report and McDonald's note that he joined the Florence Wesleyan faculty in 1857, and may have hailed from Winchester, Tennessee. For [Norman F. Briggs](#) (1835-1861), a more poignant picture can be painted. Professor of Chemistry, Geology and Mineralogy, would enter the war as a private and die at the first [battle of Manassas \(Bull Run\)](#) in July 1861, the only Alabama chemist to lose his life in Civil War battle. Briggs enlisted in the Lauderdale Volunteers, captained by [Robert McFarland](#),¹¹⁶³ becoming Company H of the 4th Alabama Infantry regiment. Leaving Alabama and arriving in Virginia the quickly came under heavy fire at Manassas. Company H losses were grievous. Of the 58 combatants that day, 10 were killed and 23 wounded. In his account for the *Florence Gazette*, Captain McFarland wrote than many of the survivors had bullet holes in their hats and clothing from narrow misses. Professor Briggs was one of the wounded, receiving severe injury to his thigh that incapacitated him on the battlefield, from which he could not be removed. He was still lingering at the time McFarland penned the article, and the date of his death was not recorded.¹¹⁶⁴

The College During the War Years.

Florence Wesleyan, under the leadership of the trustees, the support of the regional Methodist conferences, and the energy of its President [Richard Henderson Rivers](#) (1814-1894), had risen Phoenix-like from the college's flight from La Grange in 1855. On the eve of its final graduation, it

¹¹⁶² McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 42.

¹¹⁶³ "Captain Robert C. McFarland" *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed January 11, 2026

¹¹⁶⁴ Richard C. Sheridan. [Alabama Chemists in the Civil War](#). Alabama Historical Quarterly. Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 266. As yet, no information on "Professor Morgan" mentioned by has surfaced. "[Capt. Robert C. McFarland, Co. H, w4th Alabama Infantry, On the March and Battle](#)". Army of the Shenandoah. Camp Be, near Manassas, Virginia, July 29, 1861, *Bull Runnings: A Journal of the Digitization of a Civil War Battle*. Online. Accessed June 9, 2026.

boasted an enrollment of 225, was out of debt, and managing an endowment of fifty thousand dollars. But in physical pain from the buggy incident of the year before, his wife disabled, and with the prospects of a rugged war in the Tennessee Valley, Rivers elected to leave Florence Wesleyan, resigning before the Tennessee Methodist Conference in the Fall of 1861.¹¹⁶⁵ In departing, he assumed the presidency of a second school for women, the Female Department of the Summerfield Institute near Selma, Alabama. For two decades before the war, the school--with separate programs in separate buildings for both genders--had been the largest in central Alabama. However, its relative isolation did not protect the school, and it declined sharply during the war, graduating but three in 1867. After the war, Rivers served two other women's institutions: [Logan Female College](#) in Russellville, Kentucky and [Martin Female College](#) in Pulaski, Tennessee. All three were also Methodist schools, and within the denomination, Rivers was acknowledged to be an effective advocate for the educational rights of women.¹¹⁶⁶

To fill the void at Florence Wesleyan, the four sponsoring conferences turned to Dr. Robert A. Young, a gifted administrator and pastor to assume the role of President. When the Tennessee Conference convened in Athens, Alabama, in October 1861, Young was noted in the minutes as the new administrator. Paralleling Robert Paine's initial appointment to the Tuscumbia Methodist Church and La Grange College, Robert A. Young was to serve as pastor of the Florence Church and as president of Florence Wesleyan. McDonald observes that the dual appointment was the result of the shortage of Methodist ministers, as a

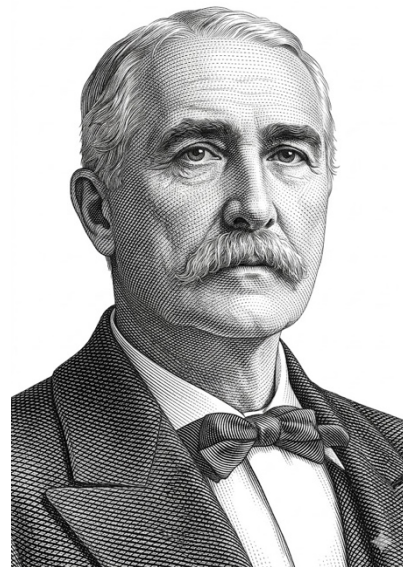
¹¹⁶⁵ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 38, p. 40.

¹¹⁶⁶ Worley, Lynda F. "A History of Centenary Institute, Selma, Alabama," *Wesleyan Quarterly Review*, February 1965; "[Centenary Institute](#)." *Abandoned Alabama*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026; "[Centenary Institute \(Alabama\)](#)", *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 38; Blandin, Mrs. I. M. E. [History of Higher Education of Women in the South](#). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909, pp. 87-89.

fifth of them were filling chaplains' ranks in the Confederate military.¹¹⁶⁷ In his *Reminiscences*, he recalls his time in Florence:

I was elected to the presidency in the fall of 1861, and took charge in the winter, at a salary of twenty-five hundred dollars a year.... I was not well qualified for the place, but I determined to study. So, I ordered on a cord of books—works on logic, rhetoric, metaphysics, political economy, Christian evidence, and the like. They are all in my library yet, except those borrowed by former Vanderbilt professors. I was fond of college life. Went in at nine o'clock A.M. and came out at twelve. For six days in the week, I had nothing to do but exist, study, and lecture. Its quietude and monotony suited my indolent disposition exactly. My pulpit labor never exceeded two sermons on Sunday. I remained in Florence three years.¹¹⁶⁸

Robert A. Young (1824 -1902) Robert Young was born into privilege, the son of John and Lucinda Young in Knox County, Tennessee. His father had been a graduate of the University of North Carolina, moving to Tennessee and becoming a large planter and slaveholder. He started life as a Presbyterian, graduating from Washington College in Limestone Tennessee in 1844. (One biographer has him graduating from the University of North Carolina in that year, but the preponderance of evidence suggests the former). While at that Presbyterian school, Young converted to Methodism. He studied medicine with a practicing physician for a while but opted instead for a career in the church, assuming his duties in 1845. After he began his ministerial duties, he picked up a Master's degree in 1850 from another Presbyterian school, Jackson College, in Columbia, Tennessee.¹¹⁶⁹



88 Robert A. Young.

¹¹⁶⁷ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 40.

¹¹⁶⁸ Young, Robert Anderson. [*Reminiscences*](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, pp. 77-78..

¹¹⁶⁹ "[Robert A. Young \(minister\).](#)" *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026; Young, Robert Anderson. [*Reminiscences*](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South,

While earning his degree, he served as minister of the Columbia Methodist church, and subsequently moved to that prestigious post in Huntsville, Alabama (1950-52), and not long afterwards to St. Louis where he served as presiding elder until the onset of war.¹¹⁷⁰

Young arrived on the job around at the beginning of January 1862, leaving a little void after Rivers' departure that Septimus Rice filled to keep the school moving ahead as more students left for the war, and the curriculum became increasingly directed toward the remaining, younger, preparatory students. Whereas 225 students had been on hand at the first semester, fewer than 100 remained for the start of classes the next semester.¹¹⁷¹

Robert Anderson Young occupies a transitional place in nineteenth-century Southern intellectual and institutional history. Neither a theologian of first rank nor a visionary educational reformer, he nonetheless exercised durable influence through administration, denominational publishing, and college governance. His presidency of Florence Wesleyan University during the Civil War may represent the most consequential episode of his notable career, situating him at the intersection of Methodist higher education, wartime crisis management, and the moral realignments of Reconstruction. Young's later role in the early governance of Vanderbilt University and his controversial intervention in post-emancipation racial discourse further illuminate the ways Southern Methodist leaders sought to preserve institutional authority amid profound social change.¹¹⁷²

Like many Methodist leaders of his generation, he followed no single linear academic path but instead moved through collegiate study, ministerial probation, and denominational service. His professional identity was shaped less by specialized scholarship than by what might be called *Methodist administrative culture*: conference discipline, itinerant responsibility, and institutional loyalty. By the 1840s and 1850s, Young had established himself as a capable minister and editor within the Methodist

1900, p. 10. Speer, William S. [*Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans*](#). Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888, pp. 414 -116.

¹¹⁷⁰ "[Robert A. Young \(minister\).](#)" *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026;

¹¹⁷¹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 35.

¹¹⁷² Speer, William S. [*Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans*](#). Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888, pp. 414 -116.

Episcopal Church, South. His later inclusion in William Speer's *Prominent Tennesseans* reflects not celebrity but standing — recognition as a reliable steward of denominational interests during a period when Southern Methodism increasingly viewed education as both a defensive and formative enterprise.¹¹⁷³

Young's appointment as president of Florence Wesleyan University in 1862 placed him in charge of a fragile institution at the most precarious moment of its existence. Florence, Alabama—strategically situated on the Tennessee River—became a repeatedly contested space during the Civil War, and Wesleyan Hall itself was subject to occupation and military use. Enrollment collapsed, faculty service was disrupted, and the ordinary rhythms of collegiate instruction proved impossible to sustain. Young's presidency must therefore be understood not in terms of curricular innovation or institutional expansion, but as *wartime triage*. Later institutional memory credited him with preserving Florence Wesleyan from permanent destruction—a claim that, while difficult to document in precise operational detail, aligns with broader patterns observed across Southern colleges during the war.¹¹⁷⁴ Young's own *Reminiscences* corroborate the atmosphere of crisis, emphasizing responsibility, providence, and institutional endurance rather than pedagogical achievement.¹¹⁷⁵

What distinguishes Young from some contemporaries is not that Florence Wesleyan flourished under his leadership, but that it *survived at all*. His administration appears to have focused on safeguarding physical assets, maintaining denominational claims to the property, and preserving enough continuity that postwar revival remained conceivable. In this sense, Young functioned as a caretaker president, embodying a model of leadership that valued preservation over progress—a stance well suited to the emergency conditions of wartime Alabama.

Even as attendance at the school lessened, the campus neglected, and the facilities lightly used, Florence Wesleyan persevered. The records of the Tennessee Methodist Conference indicate that it was never shuttered; and when it held its first meeting after the war's conclusion,

¹¹⁷³ Speer, William S. [*Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans*](#). Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888, pp. 414 -116.

¹¹⁷⁴ "University of North Alabama." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed January 15, 2026.

¹¹⁷⁵ Young, Robert Anderson. [*Reminiscences*](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900.

Young was still listed as the President of the college.¹¹⁷⁶ Retrospectively, William Basil Wood felt the decision to remain open was a mistake, an opinion he shared in the *Nashville Advocate*, January 9, 1869:

The mistake of the trustees was in not suspending exercises at the breaking out of the war, instead of trying to keep it in operation. They employed a faculty for two or three years, but the patronage being small (all the young men fit for service being in the army), and the endowment not paying, a debt of about three thousand dollars was incurred. The building and libraries, however, were saved from the torch of the Federal soldiery by the address and earnest efforts of Dr. Young, the then President “¹¹⁷⁷

At the beginning of the war, there were four professors who cobbled together the curriculum for its students. [Augustus Pruskowski](#) (1821 - 1895), a compelling itinerant recently emigrated from German, taught both the ancient and modern languages, likely replacing Ashley Davis Hurt who survived the war in service to the confederate navy. Whether he was Rivers’ hire or Young’s is unclear.¹¹⁷⁸ The trustees must have considered themselves fortunate to be able to turn over a piece of the instructional portfolio to [George Meredith Peek](#) (1839-1896)¹¹⁷⁹ in November 1861. The entirety of the faculty had departed, along with most of the militarily fit students, for war. With Rivers’ departure and Young not yet having arrived, Septimus Primus Price was anxious to fill the ranks. He anxiously wrote Peek in Richmond on November 11, explaining that the person who had tentatively accepted the position had failed to show, and “we have been

¹¹⁷⁶ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 41.

¹¹⁷⁷ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 42.

¹¹⁷⁸ Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, pp. 78-79. Augustus Prouskowski’s name is spelled several different ways in reference to Florence Wesleyan. George Peek initially identified him as Suskonski in a letter home; Young used the transliteration Pruszkowski, and University of North Alabama credits cite him as Pruskoski. The Pruskowski spelling is taken from his [headstone](#).

¹¹⁷⁹ “[George Meredith Peek](#)”. *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed January 15, 2026. The initial spelling of Peek’s middle name in family papers was Meridyth. Both Robert Young and William Lindsey McDonald spell his last name as Peak.

needing your services for some time.”¹¹⁸⁰ The 22 year old Peek, a graduate of the University of Virginia, was to be “commandant” of the new military department and teach applied mathematics. It is to his correspondence retained in the Peek family papers cited above that we have a narrow window into the happenings at Florence Wesleyan before he departed for the confederate navy in 1863.

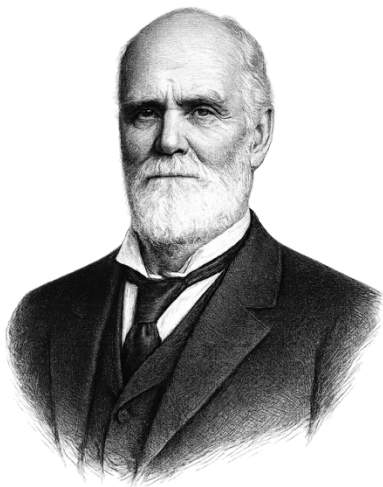
Peek’s journey to join the faculty was an arduous one— by train from Richmond to Augusta and then by road to Atlanta, then through Chattanooga to Florence. The travel required three days and absorbed \$43.50 of the \$80.00 he had to his name. Augusta, with 8,000 inhabitants was still larger than Atlanta, but he declared the two towns “the prettiest cities I ever saw.”¹¹⁸¹ As Wesleyan Hall was barely used by this juncture, Septimus Rice assigned him sleeping quarters there and he took his board at the professor’s home, about two hundred yards away. His room had once belonged to Norman Briggs, who had been killed at Manassas. He found his financial position to be pretty grim, his North Carolina and Virginia notes being non-negotiable in Florence. He enclosed them in a letter to his mother, and asked she exchange them for “some southern money.”¹¹⁸²

While it is not known how long Pruskowski was on hand, he does appear in Peek’s family correspondence from time to time. So, we know at least for part of 1862, Pruskowski, Peek, Rice and Young are there to instruct the students. Except for his time attending the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States, [Henry Cox Jones](#), was still around to contribute in the natural sciences. Informed by his correspondence with other family members about the risks of war, George seems keen to avoid the riskiest aspects of service he knew would eventually be required of him.

¹¹⁸⁰Letter. Septimus Rice to George Peek. November 11, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸¹ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸² Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.



89. Henry Cox Jones

He reluctantly went to war in March 1863, as an aide to Colonel Edward Asbury O'Neal, but managed an appointment as Professor of Mathematics in the Confederate Navy in June 1863, narrowly avoiding O'Neal's debacle at Gettysburg.¹¹⁸³

The grim reality of the war pervaded the school. Shortly after his arrival on a subsequent November night, Peek wrote to his mother, [Janet Meredith Hope Peek](#), of the disappointing situation he found at Wesleyan. While hired as a collegiate mathematics professor, that portion of the school was entirely wiped out by the departure of the students for war. Only two or three students at the preparatory level were sufficiently skilled to qualify for collegiate study. His role he sadly wrote had diminished to instructor in "a mere school."¹¹⁸⁴ He was teaching one class in Cicero to his charges, and one Algebra class.¹¹⁸⁵ McDonald notes that the military department was an attempt to compete for students with the military school that had established itself on the old grounds at La Grange.¹¹⁸⁶ And for that part of his portfolio, George Peek had greater hopes teaching the younger students. But he was having a hard time figuring out how to get it underway. "This is to be organized solely by myself," he wrote, "and carried on without conflicting with any of the rules or recitations of the schoolroom. I am to do this without guns or uniforms

¹¹⁸³ Brock, R. A. [Virginia and Virginians: Eminent Virginians, executives of the Colony of Virginia from Sir Thomas Smyth to Lord Dunmore. Executives of the State of Virginia, from Patrick Henry to Fitzhugh Lee. Sketches of Gens. Ambrose Powel Hill, Robert E. Lee, Thos. Johnathan Jackson.](#) Richmond: H. H. Hardesty, 1888, p. 689.

¹¹⁸⁴ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871.](#) Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸⁵ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, December 9, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871.](#) Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸⁶ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 31.

at present.”¹¹⁸⁷ The Alabama state armory was exhausted, he explained, and there were no weapons available. His despair evident in his tone, Peek assured his mother that he hoped to get his charges uniformed and armed, “and have a regular military school of it after all.”

And so it was with the town itself. Florence was a village of about 1,500 inhabitants, smaller than the Peek hometown of Hampton, Virginia, but well laid out and attractive. It was already entirely blockaded by the Union navy to the mouth of the Ohio River. It was also removed about half a mile from the river, he added, as the townspeople considered it to be a breeding ground for malarial disease.¹¹⁸⁸ Because of the blockade, commerce was almost entirely suspended, and it showed in the consumption the townspeople. “Here for the first time in my life,” he noted, “I have tasted parched corn coffee.” Professor Rice’s wife, Maria Wood Rice, dressed plainly and they lived in a “common” style. He liked Septimus Rice, still acting as school head until the arrival of Young, and noted that he had welcomed Peek’s arrival warmly. But, he added, Mrs. Rice, the sister of William Basil Wood, appeared to be “somewhat delicate, and I think either a spoilt child or a pet.”¹¹⁸⁹

Augustus Pruskowski was also quartered in Wesleyan Hall. His countenance and deportment seemed to strike a response in everyone he met for the first time. Peek described him as a “hermit”, who stayed in his room exclusively, even cooking his meals there. Pruskowski was, he wrote his mother, “the strangest looking man I ever saw,” and though he would later revise his opinion, he added, that he feared he would never find his colleague to be “a very congenial companion.”¹¹⁹⁰ President Young echoed that assessment when he arrived and got to know Pruskowski, writing in his *Reminiscences* that he was “the loneliest human being I have ever seen,”

¹¹⁸⁷ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸⁸ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, November 23, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁸⁹ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁹⁰ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, November 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

indeed living “precisely as a hermit is supposed to live.”¹¹⁹¹ It appears to have been a lifestyle of choice. As late as 1880, Pruskowski, still living in Florence, informed the census taker that he was single, and that his occupation was “hermit.”¹¹⁹²

Yet, observed Young, Pruskowski had credentials from 4 German universities, including the LL. D. from Heidelberg. For a number of years, he found employment at the [Columbia Atheneum](#) in Columbia, Tennessee. The president of the school, Robert D. Smith, noted that Pruskowski taught both art and language at the Atheneum for the better part of two decades. His Polish family, he added, was very highly connected but was caught up in the intrigues of the 1848 revolutions in Prussian-occupied Poland, forcing Augustus to migrate to the United States. He seems to have been naturalized in New York in 1854.¹¹⁹³ He noted that Pruskowski would work on as many as a dozen paintings at one time, analyze his own work critically, and then more often than not, overpaint the all the canvases and start anew. He typically refused to sell any of his work, noted Smith, and any of his acquaintances fortunate enough to possess one of his works remained unaware that beneath the final layer of oil, “there are dozens of others hidden from view.”¹¹⁹⁴ As noted earlier, his drawing of Wesleyan Hall, lithographed in New York, hangs at the University of North Alabama. Affirming Pruskowski’s earlier predilections, Smith added that he spent his last two years as a recluse in a remote cabin he built with his own hands. He died there in 1898.

In 1859-60, there had been 25 students in the preparatory department of Florence Wesleyan, some of those turned of age and headed off to war as had other students before them. If their family fortunes held together in increasingly challenging times, they provided a small income for the faculty. George Washington Foster’s son, fourteen year-old [Anthony](#)

¹¹⁹¹ Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900.

¹¹⁹² "United States, Census, 1880", [Family Search](#) Entry for Augustus Pruskowski, 1880.

¹¹⁹³ "New York, County Naturalization Records, 1791-1980", [Family Search](#). Entry for Augustus Pruskowski, 1854.

¹¹⁹⁴ Smith, Robert D. “Augustus Pruskowski.” Notice written November 30, 1900 and on file In *Louis Schuchardt Material*, Part of [Winkler, Frederick C. Papers](#). *Milwaukee County Historical Society*.

was a student in 1861.¹¹⁹⁵ James Wright Tucker is one of the few students known to have received instruction at the college during the war years. It is not clear that a degree was awarded but he was admitted into the North Alabama Conference as an itinerant preacher in 1874.¹¹⁹⁶ On the 9th of December, in a letter to his sister, Peek complained that while he was hailed as “professor” or “Captain” by the townspeople, he still lacked a uniform, and there remained no prospect of guns for his students. Perhaps, he suggested, his father could inquire of Virginia armories, if there were some that might be spared for the Valley? His social life was beginning to pick up however, and he wrote of a tea one evening at the home of Judge [John Edmund Moore](#) (1815-1864), and making the acquaintance there of the daughter of Edward Asbury O’Neal, [Rebecca](#), and that of George Washington Foster, likely [Virginia](#). He suggested that Judge Moore was considering raising a regiment for the war, and that he would ask the judge for a position within its officer corps.¹¹⁹⁷ Among the other homes at which the young professor was hosted were those of chairman of the board of trustees George Washington Foster, and Dr. James W. Stewart. The ravages of war were daily present in Florence. Stewart had lost a brother to the privations of the struggle, and Peek wrote of seeing returning survivors of the 4th Alabama walking the streets on wooden legs and limbs in slings.¹¹⁹⁸ December would end with Florence still spared the presence of enemy garrisons in the city and region, but that would soon change. Even as the holiday was celebrated with joy and thanksgiving free from war, modest deprivation was evident even among the elite. Peek noted that the Christmas dinner he attended at the home of George Washington Foster was the equivalent of a Sunday meal at home: two

¹¹⁹⁵ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 79-80.

¹¹⁹⁶ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 42, pp. 79-80.

¹¹⁹⁷ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, December 9, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹¹⁹⁸ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, December 14, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

courses consisting of a modest entree and cake.¹¹⁹⁹ Things would soon change for the worse.

In December, the young women would still gather to watch George Peek drill his young charges.¹²⁰⁰ On January 1, President Robert Anderson Young formally took charge of the college. Upon meeting, Peek described him as “the tallest and finest looking man I ever saw.”¹²⁰¹ He reported to his sister that they were now in regular operation as a college; that his company was at least formed, and he was dubbed “major” by his friends in town. Peek even found time for a practice bivouac with five of his charges, spending some three hours in a nearby cave before turning in around the campfire. Pruskowski had loaned him his horse for the outing, and one of the townspeople provided a slave to provide forage and serve as a guide.¹²⁰² In letters to his father, he solicited help obtaining lace, braid and buttons for his and his charges uniforms. The fabric he could obtain at the largesse of the Florentine textile factory operators. The weapons for his troops, he told his sister, he would fashion from wood.

Then, in 1862 war came to Florence. Union forces first appeared at Florence by water. On February 8, 1862, timber clad gunboats pushed up the defenseless Tennessee River to Florence, capturing three riverboats loaded with confederate supplies and destroying others. At the sight of the approaching timber clads, the crews of the steamboats *Julia H. Smith*, *Kirkman* and *Time* set their ships ablaze. The latter had been heavily laden with supplies for the Confederate war effort. Although coming as a great shock to the inhabitants, this first federal incursion inflicted little damage. The docks were searched for usable supplies and equipment. The gunboats were filled with capacity with items, the commandant, Lt. Commander [Seth Leyard Phelps](#) found useful, and after about three hours they sailed away. The significance of the occurrence lay not in combat but in demonstration. Union troops asserted control over river landings, seized supplies, and

¹¹⁹⁹ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his mother, December 26, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book download.

¹²⁰⁰ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, December 9, 1861. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book

¹²⁰¹ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, January 2, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book

¹²⁰² Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, January 3, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book

made clear that the Tennessee River now functioned as a federal military highway rather than a Confederate commercial artery.¹²⁰³

The situation worsened. On April 7, 1862, Shiloh fell and on April 9, the first Union cavalry raid into Lauderdale County occurred; supplies were seized, and prisoners were taken. On April 11, Union General O. M. Mitchell entered Huntsville. A week later, on April 13, Colonel [Benjamin Hardin Helm](#), on orders from Confederate General Johnston, burned Florence bridge across the Tennessee River. The bridge was a two level structure, with the spur connecting the town to the railroad across the river on the top, and a one lane bridge beneath. With its destruction, Florence was cut off from the Memphis and Charleston railroad, and an irregular ferry was the only means for the conduct of commerce



90 Florence Railway bridge across the Tennessee River, circa 1860.

and transport until it was finally rebuilt in 1870. On April 16, Union forces briefly occupied Tuscumbia and before departing, burned the landing. Union ground occupation followed in summer 1862, when Buell's forces held Florence and the 10th Kentucky Infantry (Col. John Marshall Harlan) was posted there. Union troops would remain in Florence or the immediate area for all of 1862.¹²⁰⁴ From Tuscumbia to Stevenson, the Tennessee

¹²⁰³ Kenneth R. Johnson, "[Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862](#)," *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981): 162–165. See also Johnson citations: 32ORA, 7:154-55; Florence Gazette, Feb. 12 and 26, 1862; Hugh C Bailey, "Reaction in the Tennessee Valley to the Federal Invasion," *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association* 5 (1960): 3-4; Masters, Daniel J. "[Two Yankee Gunboats at Our Landing!](#)" *Naval History Blog*, 2019. Online. Accessed January 19, 2026

¹²⁰⁴ Wallace, Harry E. *History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*. A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily*, February 25, 1999- and accessible via Rootsweb . [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#). Online. Rootsweb.com. Part 4: summary identifying June 1862 occupation by 10th Kentucky under Harlan); Gamble, Robert S. [George Coulter House](#), National Register of Historic Places Inventory–Nomination Form (Washington, DC:

Valley plantation district was largely under federal control.¹²⁰⁵ George Peek wrote to his sister that he was now in “Lincolndom” and had packed a carpet bag should circumstances force him to cross the river and flee to Corinth.¹²⁰⁶

Remarkably, Florence Wesleyan and the Synodical College each maintained a physical presence but functioned informally. But, as George Peek told his father, while the war and the Union presence had reduced the college, it would continue operation, for “the endowment fund will be forfeited if the college closes.”¹²⁰⁷ In March 1862, George was invited to live at the home of Dr. James W. Stewart and his wife and son, an arrangement for which the doctor would accept no recompense. Peek reported in the same letter that he was still drilling his young charges but had all but abandoned his prospects of uniforms for them. The college was down to eight students he lamented, with the faculty instructing thirty or forty young boys in the preparatory department; his portfolio included writing and military tactics.¹²⁰⁸

At the beginning of January, George Peek had written to his brothers that his school, under the leadership of its new president, was “increasing daily.”¹²⁰⁹ But, with the summer arrival of the 10th Kentucky, Florence was transformed. Historian Kenneth Johnson graphically summarize the results:

National Park Service, 1981); *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, vol. 22 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), reports of Lt. S. L. Phelps. *U.S. Navy operations on the Tennessee River under Lt. Seth Ledyard Phelps, February 1862*, reporting the upriver advance of the timberclads **USS Tyler**, **USS Lexington**, and **USS Conestoga** as far as Florence; Kenneth R. Johnson, “[Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862](#),” *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981): 162–165.

¹²⁰⁵ Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baston Rouge: University Press, 2017, p.52.

¹²⁰⁶ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, April 25 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

¹²⁰⁷ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his father, February 15, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

¹²⁰⁸ Letters, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, March 5, 1862, March 12, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

¹²⁰⁹ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his brothers at home, January 2, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

*Union gunboats changed the Tennessee River from a commercial artery to a military highway. Many merchants, unable to restock, simply closed their businesses. The Florence Gazette ceased publication. The ferries, telegraph, and railroad were seized by the Union army and used mainly for military purposes. Private property and human rights ceased to be respected. Homes and public buildings were sometimes taken over and used for military purposes. Food stored in barns, smokehouses, or pantries was never secure from pillaging soldiers and criminals. Homes and businesses were often searched and private property taken or destroyed. After passage of the second Confiscation Act by the United States Congress in July 1862, private citizens whose loyalty was suspect were subject to arrest and interrogation....*¹²¹⁰

The [George Coulter house](#) was commandeered and used as a headquarters by Colonel [John Marshall Harlan](#) (later an associate justice of the U. S. Supreme Court).¹²¹¹

In the summer of 1862, Congress passed the second Confiscation Act, decreeing that citizens in the occupied regions could be arrested and interrogation if their loyalty to the Union was suspect. Certainly, the occupying forces were capable of treating the local rudely. On July 26, William H. Mitchell, principal of the Florence Female Synodical College and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church was arrested at his pulpit for his prayers in support of the Confederate cause and the well-being of its president, Jefferson Davis. He was imprisoned for some months in Alton, Illinois.¹²¹² The events shook Florence. Sallie Independence Foster, then a 13-year old student at Florence Female Synodical college, and daughter of George Washington Foster, wrote the very first entry in her civil war diaries:

It has been a really distressing day. The Yanks went into the Presbyterian Church and took Dr. Mitchell prisoner while he was praying and took him over the river,

¹²¹⁰ Kenneth R. Johnson, ["Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862,"](#) *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981), p. 168.

¹²¹¹ Gamble, Robert S. [George Coulter House](#), National Register of Historic Places Inventory–Nomination Form (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1981). Online. Accessed January 19, 2026

¹²¹² Jill Knight Garrett. [A History of Florence Alabama: \(with 1850 census of Lauderdale County\)](#). Columbia, TN: Published by the author. 1968, p. 22, p. 32; Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, p. 80; Glass, Debra. ["Two Martyrs: Robin Lightfoot and W. H. Mitchell."](#) *Civil War's Western Theater*. Online. Accessed January 19, 2026; Kenneth R. Johnson, ["Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862,"](#) *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981), p. 169.

*sent word to his wife that she must come to see him, or she would not see him again.*¹²¹³

Her family was not immune. No less than Florence Wesleyan trustee chair and prominent Florentine, George Washington Foster, was arrested in August, and held in Tuscumbia for six days before being released unharmed.¹²¹⁴

The city was in disarray. The board of alderman met only three times in 1862. The town was failing financially. With servicemen exempt from taxation, and businesses closing because of the blockade, taxes went uncollected, and revenue was non-existent. The aldermen lacked even the \$4 expended by the town sexton he had expended for a burial in the town cemetery.¹²¹⁵ Alabama law required that municipal elections were to be held each December, but in December 1862, elections were not held. Florence city government essentially ceased to function, and the structure in place to control an enslaved population collapsed. The periodic presence of Union troops made it easier for slaves to flee their masters. Sallie Independence Foster wrote in her diary that two of the family slaves, Monroe and Summerfield, escaped and took with them the Foster's flocks of chicken and geese. When slaves on the O'Neal plantation left, they took with them the family's women's and children's clothing. Overcome by the turn of events, George Washington Foster traveled across the river to confront some of his former slaves gathered near a military camp but was unable to coerce them to return. In the words of historian Kenneth Johnson:

*Clearly the owners could no longer control their slave property, and by the end of 1862 public authority was no longer available to lend support to their efforts. Thus, to a great degree, the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, merely gave legal recognition to the conditions which already prevailed in Florence, Alabama.*¹²¹⁶

¹²¹³ Glass, Debra. ["Two Martyrs: Robin Lightfoot and W. H. Mitchell."](#) *Civil War's Western Theater*. Online. Accessed January 19, 2026

¹²¹⁴ Kenneth R. Johnson, ["Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862,"](#) *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981), p. 168.

¹²¹⁵ Kenneth R. Johnson, ["Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862,"](#) *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981), p. 169.

¹²¹⁶ Kenneth R. Johnson, ["Slavery and Racism in Florence, Alabama: 1841–1862,"](#) *Civil War History* 27, no. 2 (June 1981), pp. 170-171.

In a later letter, he noted that a conscription law had passed the Confederate congress, but as a college professor he was yet exempt from its provisions, and would continue to look for a more comfortable, safer, position than he would obtain if conscripted.¹²¹⁷ On September 8, Peek wrote that the college was about to open for another term and the trustees had asked him to remain. At this juncture, he reported he was now boarding at the home of George Washington Foster, although he would soon return to his room at Wesleyan Hall and take his meals with Septimus Rice and family. Peek's salary was set by the trustees at a trifling \$600. He did sound a complaint about the "old castle" with its mice and broken windows.¹²¹⁸

George Peek soon left Florence and the college, securing his appointment as a member of Col. Edward Asbury O'Neal's 26th Alabama Infantry staff. George traveled with Asbury's son and reported to the unit in Virginia in March, the Colonel permitting him to remain in Florence until winter had receded. In the interregnum, news of his appointment elevated his status in town. He wrote to his sister that he was responsible for drilling two companies of volunteers and militia every day in addition to minding his classes. However, he reported the College to be down to eleven students, with another 15 or so in the preparatory school. By April 1863, he was with O'Neal and the regiment in the Army of Virginia.¹²¹⁹ With the promotion to brigadier appearing to be elusive, and that promotion apparently contingent for Peek's staff appointment to the 26th, O'Neal worked with him to secure another post. In June 1863, George Peek secured appointment as Professor of Mathematics in the Confederate States Navy, with the rank of Master. He was subsequently promoted to 1st Lieutenant and served until the close of the war. He would earn a law

¹²¹⁷ Letter, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, May 3, 1862, March 12, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

¹²¹⁸ Letters, George Meridyth Peek to his sister, September 8, 1862, and mother, October 19, 1862. [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book. In the letter to his mother, he attributes the decision to leave the Foster's to the drunken behavior of an unnamed son.

¹²¹⁹ Letters, George Meridyth Peek to his mother and sister, December 29, 1862 (sister), January 7m, 1863 (mother), January 25, 1863 (sister), February 23, 1863 (sister), n.d. April 1863 (sister). [Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871](#). Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

degree from the University of Virginia in 1847, practicing in Hampton and serving the state and city as a judge.¹²²⁰

It would fall to Robert Young and Septimus Rice to keep that keep the small cadre of students going through the war. At no point in his *Reminiscences* does Young suggest the college was ever closed. As historian McDonald observed, records of the Tennessee Methodist Conference confirm that Florence Wesleyan was never closed, and that at the first official session of the conference after the war, Young was still listed as President.¹²²¹ There were challenges to be certain, and amidst the comings and goings of both armies, both college and town were at risk. Good fortune spared them the fate of Tuscaloosa and La Grange. In May 1863, Young crossed paths with Col. Florence M. Cornyn, commander of the “Destroying Angels” of the 10th Missouri Cavalry. The mission of his command, some 1,300 strong, was to burn and destroy the manufacturing and industrial capacity of the region, textile, iron, and other assets.¹²²² A month after torching La Grange, they were in Florence, where they continued their predation, burning factories and some shops. Ed O’Neal, Jr. wrote to George Meek that they took his weapon from his home and in confrontation with his mother threatened to burn their home.¹²²³ The timely intervention of the 6’8” Robert Young, at risk to himself, averted that outcome. He then sought out Colonel Cornyn and demanded he spare the town further damage. An officer of the 7th Illinois Infantry accompanying Cornyn relayed the rancorous exchange between the two men that produced an assurance of safety for the inhabitants.¹²²⁴ After this encounter, Young busied himself with caching and preserving what he could of the university’s assets, for example removing the library books to

¹²²⁰ Brock, R. A. [*Virginia and Virginians: Eminent Virginians, executives of the Colony of Virginia from Sir Thomas Smyth to Lord Dunmore. Executives of the State of Virginia, from Patrick Henry to Fitzhugh Lee. Sketches of Gens. Ambrose Powel Hill, Robert E. Lee, Thos. Johnathan Jackson.*](#) Richmond: H. H. Hardesty, 1888, p. 688.

¹²²¹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.*](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 41.

¹²²² McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.*](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 43.

¹²²³ Letter, Ed. A. O’Neal, Jr. to George Peek, June 28, 1863.. [*Peek Family Papers, 1847-1871.*](#) Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina. Internet Archives. Kindle Book.

¹²²⁴ Ambrose, D. Lieb. [*History of the 7th Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry.*](#) Springfield: Illinois Journal Company, 1868, p. 173.

the homes of Florentines. Most survived and made their way back to the college once the war ended.¹²²⁵

But much of his work was still ahead of him, for on November 3, General [William Tecumseh Sherman](#), now in command of the Army of Tennessee, marched into Florence, enroute to the sea. Four divisions were encamped in around Florence for the first part of November, with concentrations around Florence Wesleyan. Youthful diarist Sallie Independence Foster penned that soldiers were camped on the yard of their Courtview mansion all the way to Wesleyan Hall. Sallie fumed she had to surrender her bedroom to Union officers. Young quartered at the Weakley home and made Wesleyan Hall his headquarters. The library on the first floor became Sherman's office. President Young's office was adjacent.¹²²⁶ During their brief time together, the two imposing men got to know each other, establishing a relationship of mutual respect. They exchanged their views on war and slavery, and Sherman underscored his determination to crush the rebellion. Sherman knew that other Union troops under his trusted subordinate Grenville Mellen Dodge would soon occupy Florence, and as a precaution Sherman before departing gave Young an order that, in the President's words, protect the college's property and faculty.¹²²⁷



91 William Tecumseh Sherman

In the randomness and caprice of war, it is not always possible to explain why some towns are spared and others are destroyed, why some colleges are untouched, and others are burned to the ground. Perhaps in the case of Florence and Florence Wesleyan University, it was the rapport

¹²²⁵ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 44.

¹²²⁶ Kayla Scott, University of North Alabama, "Sallie Independence Foster," *Omeka at Auburn*, accessed January 21, 2026, <https://omeka.lib.auburn.edu/items/show/408>. Foster's diaries are accessible in Special Collections of the University of North Alabama in Florence, but have not been digitized. The citation to her remarks here were noted by McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 46.

¹²²⁷ Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, p. 81.

that two men established in a few weeks in November 1863. Perhaps it could have been Sherman's recollection of his law partner's education there. Or perhaps it could even have been that little George Peek could never succeed in obtaining weapons for his would be university militia and never succeeded in establishing them as a uniformed entity. Unlike La Grange and the University of Alabama, Florence Wesleyan, despite its predilections, never militarized. Thus, Courtview on one end of campus and Wesleyan Hall on another, remain on the University of North Alabama grounds as historic landmarks of another time.

Chapter 10

La Grange College and La Grange Military Academy 1855-1862

La Grange on the Mountain.

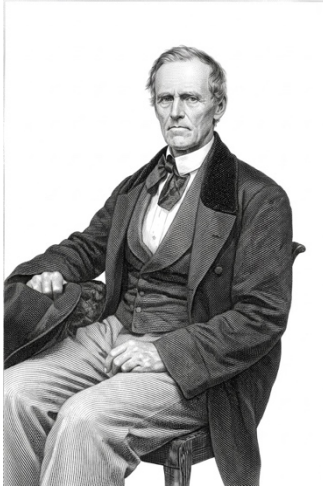
From their perch on Lawrence's Hill, the local elite watched the departure of the Methodist college to Florence with anger and apprehension. The region had already suffered losses. Families such as the Paines and the Saunders had moved to Mississippi and in the year before the college left; a 100 wagon convoy had departed Leighton for Texas, fleeing worn soils and narrowing prospects. The Tennessee Conference and other Methodist groups approved the relocation of their school. The mountain was bare.

Newspapers blamed Richard Henderson Rivers as the chief agent of relocation. Yet, while the school had relocated, the charter of 1850 was retained and the property remained. The trustees south of the river, supported by the courts in dispute over ownership, resolved to revive the institution on the original site.¹²²⁸ Led by planters and professionals--[John Townsend Abernathy](#), [Fletcher Curtis Vinson](#), [Oswald King](#), [Philemon King](#), and [Edward Brodnax Delony](#). J. T. Abernathy's son, [Dr. Robert Townes Abernathy](#), [Dr. George Kumpe](#) and [Dr. John Smith Napier](#)—they undertook to reopen LaGrange as an independent college, this time without Methodist sponsorship.¹²²⁹

The first act was to appoint a new president. The trustees selected [Felix Johnson](#) (1803-1883), trustee of the Cumberland Presbyterian church in Pulaski, Tennessee and styled him, pointedly, as the *fifth* president of Las Grange. A graduate of Cumberland College in Princeton, Kentucky,

¹²²⁸ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 15.

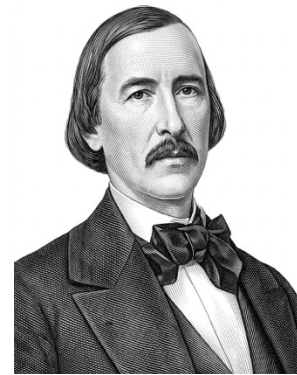
¹²²⁹ Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama, Approved 14 January 1850: [No. 17S.] [AN ACT To amend an act entitled "An act to establish La Grange College; Steen](#), Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 89.



92. Rev Felix Johnson

Johnson had spent nearly two decades as an itinerant pastor in north Alabama and middle Tennessee. In 1855, he accepted the trustee's call and began the practical work of rebuilding a faculty from whatever talent remained nearby.¹²³⁰ He and the trustees scanned the environs for recent La Grange graduates who were qualified and willing to step forward quickly. When most of the faculty left for Florence, only Thomas Smith and Edward Goodwin remained on the mountain.

Edward Goodwin (1830-1863), a graduate of the class of 1851, accepted appointment as Professor of Ancient Language, remaining through 1862 and the college's transformation into a military academy, and until the school's ultimate closure. By marriage to Ann "Annie" Lafayette King, daughter of trustee Hartwell and wife Burchet, he was already bound to one of the Valley's leading families. Gifted in letters, Goodwin penned Lily White, a modestly received but widely read romance that is still accessible.



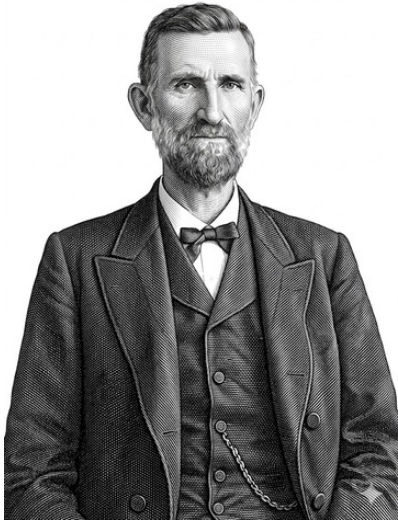
93 Edward Goodwin

When the war came, Goodwin helped organize the 35th Alabama Infantry in La Grange, entering service as Captain of Company K. He later rose to field rank. He would die in uniform, attending a court martial in Columbus, Mississippi September 25, 1863. His students remembered him as a demanding but inspiring teacher, making Virgil sound like living poetry.¹²³¹

¹²³⁰ Yates, Molly. "Rev. Felix Johnson, D. D." Cumberland Presbyterian Ministers, Past and Present. Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America Online. Accessed January 22, 2026.

¹²³¹ "Col. Edward Goodwin," *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed January 22, 2026; James B. Lloyd, ed. *Lives of Mississippi Authors 1817-1967*. University Press of Mississippi. 1981, p. 198; Bruce Allardice. *Confederate Colonels, A Biographical Register*. Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008; James B. Lloyd, ed. *Lives of Mississippi Authors 1817-1967*. University Press of Mississippi. 1981, p. 198; Wyeth, John Allan. *History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, [and] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*. New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 46-50;

Joining Goodwin on the faculty, as Professor of Mathematics was another member of the King family, [Robert King](#) (1832-1905). An 1852 graduate, he was the son of planter [William Oswald](#) and [Martha Rebecca Delony King](#). Robert taught for only one year before returning to the farm



94 Albert Alexander McGregor

near Leighton. His role would be assumed by another member of the faculty, 1854 La Grange graduate, [Albert Alexander McGregor](#) (1835-1907).¹²³² His father William and mother Elizabeth moved into the Town Creek area of Lawrence County in 1825 and established a working farm. His parents were able to provide him access to good schooling there, and his accomplishments assured him of a place at La Grange College, from which he graduated with distinction in 1854. McGregor had his own ties to the Kings. Like Edward Goodwin, he was married to a daughter of Hartwell and Burchet King, [Celia](#) (1838-1900). They would have four

children, one named Edward Goodwin after his colleague and brother-in-law.

Until the position became available at the college, McGregor taught at the Town Creek school he had previously attended. Initially, King and McGregor shared the mathematics curriculum at the new version, King teaching pure mathematics and McGregor, mixed mathematics. With King's departure, McGregor shouldered all the courses. He would stay with the school through its iterations until classes were suspended in March 1862 following the outbreak of the war and the approach of Union troops into the Tennessee Valley. Joining the Confederate army as a private in October 1862, his educational status earned him promotion to captain and appointment as a regimental quartermaster. He would survive the war unscathed but would lose a brother at the [Battle of Franklin](#). After the war, he returned to farming and at the request of the families still in La Grange taught school in the old Methodist church there. In 1878 McGregor then assumed the principalship of the Male Academy in Tuscumbia, but

¹²³² McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, pp. 15-16; McGregor, Stuart W. "[Professor A. A. McGregor](#)." *Ardchoille: Newsletter of the American Clan Gregor Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 2014). Online. Accessed January 22, 2026.

health issues to relinquish the role, returning to his farm where he recuperated. In 1885, he was offered the presidency of the [Union Male and Female College](#) in Hartselle, near Decatur. He remained in that role for three years until an old colleague, John Calvin Stephenson, persuaded him to accept the superintendency of the Waco public schools in Texas. Returning to the Tennessee Valley after only a year, he taught school at Town Creek and Leighton until 1894.¹²³³

After retirement he was a popular speaker and writer, contributing several articles to the local newspaper on the history of La Grange College. After the 1904 student reunion on La Grange, those articles were pulled together, edited and published as a book. His fugitive, small history of La Grange College, published in 1904, is the most reliable history of the institution, is trusted, and is heavily cited by the historians of the twentieth century investigating higher education in the region. However, it has never been digitized and is hard to locate in libraries; those locations, some 22, can be found in [World Cat](#).¹²³⁴

Appointed to teach moral science, chemistry and natural sciences was **William Graves Williams** (1806-1874), from Massachusetts and a graduate of Amherst. A Presbyterian minister, he spent much of his life as an educator. Spending some thirteen years in Virginia (Richmond and Salem) and another 5 in Georgia (St. Mary's, Athens, and Decatur). He studied law in while teaching in Virginia and was admitted to the bar in 1841. While in Georgia, he studied theology and was ordained in 1848. He would stay in La Grange after the college closed, living in the former Tutwiler home.¹²³⁵

John Allan Wyeth recalls that he and other students would take opportunity to divert him from his lecture, consuming class time on more frivolous matters:

Our Professor of Chemistry and Natural Science and Moral and Mental Science was Rev. W. G. Williams, A. M. He was a native of Massachusetts and had been educated there but came South to LaGrange, in 1855, to teach Chemistry and Natural Science. He was a man of so much learning and with such

¹²³³ [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 64.

¹²³⁴ Johnson, Kenneth R. "A. A. McGregor," [Life in the Muscle Shoals](#). Florence: Bluewater Publications. Tennessee Valley Historical Society, 2013. Online version, n. p.

¹²³⁵ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 9, p. 15;

*marked eccentricities that he had earned the nickname of "Socrates," which had degenerated into the shorter appellation of "Old Soc." He was a faithful instructor and deserved more of the appreciation of his pupils than he received. We recognized his high attainments but never felt entirely at home in his classroom. He was fond of argument and the discussion of any question in history or philosophy which was under consideration, and not infrequently, when the lesson was long and difficult, we would conspire to bring out some point for elucidation, get the dear old Professor started on the theme and then fan the flame by further interrogatories until the drum beat to tell us the section was over. Even now I feel repentant for my share of these classroom sins, and could I again meet this good man face to face I would ask his forgiveness.*¹²³⁶

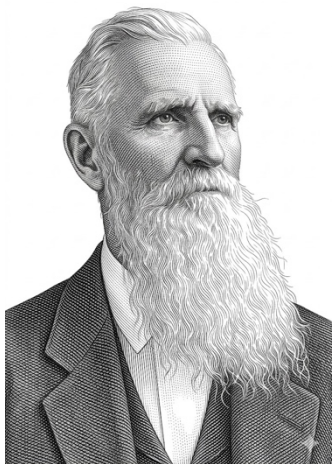
His only son, [Robert M. Williams](#) (1841-1863) was enrolled in at La Grange in its final year and invariably earned the sobriquet "Bob Soc" after his father. Early in the war, Robert entered the 16th Alabama Regiment as a private. Tragically, and ironically, while visiting La Grange from service, Robert was thrown from his horse and killed. He is buried in the La Grange Cemetery adjacent to his mother, [Susan Adelaide Miller Williams](#), who died in 1859.¹²³⁷ He may have been visiting his father, who after the campus was vacated, at the behest of local citizens taught a small private school on the grounds. However, he abandoned that effort after a while and returned to Massachusetts.¹²³⁸ In September 1964, he entered Union service as a Hospital Chaplin. He served in various hospitals in Memphis—Jackson, Washington and Marine hospitals through 1865—and subsequently as Chaplin of the U. S. General Hospital and U.S. Military prison in St. John's, Arkansas. He was mustered out in May 1866.¹²³⁹

¹²³⁶ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857–1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830–1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 46-50.

¹²³⁷ Owen, Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 2, 1921, p. 838; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 33.

¹²³⁸ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857–1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830–1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 46-50, p. 191.

¹²³⁹ [Roll of Graduates and Undergraduates of Amherst College Who Served in the Army or Navy of the United States During the War of Rebellion](#). Amherst: Henry M. McCloud, 1871, p. 5.



95 John Calvin Stephenson

[John Calvin Stephenson](#) (1823-1909) completed the little faculty who helped re-start La Grange as a classical college in 1856. An 1849 graduate of La Grange, he oversaw the preparatory school for two years, 1856-57. His wife, [Mary Ann Curtis Napier](#), whom he married in 1855, was a graduate of Athens Female College and the daughter of Dr. John Smith Napier and his wife Mary. He spent twenty years in various educational roles, teaching at La Grange, administering a college for women in Oxford, Mississippi and teaching in the public schools of Waco, Texas, to which he recruited his friend Albert McGregor. After his educational career, he and Mary remained in Waco, where for another twenty years he pursued a range of mercantile interests.¹²⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that among the members of the Masonic Lodge at Le Grange in 1856 were Stephenson, his father in law, Dr. John Smith Napier and fellow La Grange faculty Felix Johnson and Edward Goodwin.¹²⁴¹

When Stephenson left in 1857, his role was taken by [Absalom Leonidas Davis \(1832-1922\)](#). Absalom had been a student at Randolph-Macon and followed his brother Frank Mark Davis to the Tennessee Valley. Frank had moved to North Alabama in 1850, initially earning a living teaching planters and farmers the efficacy of composting fertilizers. Learning of La Grange, Frank elected to enroll as a 20 year-old, graduating with a Master's degree in 1852. In June of that year, he married [Celia Fennell](#) (1836-1894). Daughter of James and Mary Curtis King Fennell one of the most prominent families in the valley, Celia had just recently



96 Absalom Leonidas Davis

¹²⁴⁰ Stephenson, J. C. [The Stephenson Family](#). Privately published. 1906, pp. 37-40; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p.33; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 16.

¹²⁴¹ Shackleford, Josephus. [History of the Muscle Shoals Baptist Association from 1820 to 1890, a period of 70 years; with a history of the churches of the same and a biographical sketch of its ministers](#). Trinity Alabama: Published by the Author, 1891, p. 256.

graduated from the Athens Academy for women. Absalom transferred in his junior year from Randolph-Macon and began courting Celia's sister, [Ann Fennell](#) (1839-1905), a recent graduate of [Salem Academy](#) in North Carolina. Absalom graduated in the winter of 1855. They married in February 1856. Returning from their honeymoon, he took over the head of the Preparatory School, completing the 1858 year.¹²⁴² In addition to farming, he would teach and support the Methodist church as the need arose after completing the required course of study and becoming a local elder in the church. He never entered the itinerancy.¹²⁴³

[John Summerfield Davis](#) (1827-1909), a practicing Methodist minister, also moved to the area. Remarkably, he too married into the Fennell family, wedding [Susan Fennell](#) in 1855. They moved initially to Raleigh where he was a pastor before returning to the Valley in 1856 as a minister in the Tennessee Conference. As seen, the Fennells were wealthy slaveholders and landowners. James Fennell was a major stockholder in the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur railroad that became a part of the Memphis & Charleston line. It was the custom of Mary Curtis King Fennell, his wife, to deed to each of the children a substantial land hold upon marriage. Ann and Absalom held acreage adjacent to Celia and Frank. Additionally, each were given a substantial number of slaves to operate their plantations.



97 John Summerfield Davis

With the advent of war, John Summerfield and Absalom, as ministers, would be issued certificates that exempted them from service. Additionally, one writer asserts that planters with more than 30 slaves were exempted for producing food for the troops and raising cotton. Their brother, Frank Mark Davis did serve the Confederacy, rising to the rank of captain. He fought at Shiloh where he was captured and later released in a

¹²⁴² Henry, Mary Davis and Anne Henry Tidmore. [Forest Home: the Annals of Ann Fennell Davis](#). 2005.

¹²⁴³ Henry, Mary Davis and Anne Henry Tidmore. [Forest Home: the Annals of Ann Fennell Davis](#). 2005; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 34.

prisoner exchange.¹²⁴⁴ Frank served on the last Board of Trustees of La Grange Military Academy.¹²⁴⁵

The little college on Lawrence's Hill faced severe hardships. According to Robert Steen, there were no more than twenty five students receiving instruction when the school re-started. Only one student, [Benjamin Rush King](#) (1834-1918), was graduated in 1855. He was the son of William Oswald and Martha Rebecca Delony King, subsequently studying medicine with Dr. Kumpe, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania (1861), and practicing medicine in Leighton. With tuition revenue insufficient to sustain the college, substantial contributions from the trustees were required to compensate the faculty and pay the bills. Prominent contributors included Col. John T. Abernethy, Dr. George E. Kumpe, Col. F. C. Vinson, Oswald King, Philemon King, Hartwell King, Dr. John S. Napier and Richard Preuit.¹²⁴⁶

The next year, 1856, as the trustees began studying alternative sustainability models, there were but two graduates: John Curtis Jones and William M. Mayes, an unsuccessful suitor of Ann Fennell. Like Benjamin the year before, they both became physicians. Mayes, son of former La



98 John Curtis Jones

Grange steward Drury Mayes, served the 16th Alabama as a surgeon, and died young in 1868.¹²⁴⁷ [John Curtis Jones](#) (1837-1904) was the son of Tignal (1811-1887) and Susan King (1815-1866) Jones. Tignal was a La Grange trustee, and Susan was another of the daughters of Hartwell and Burchet. After graduation he made his way to Texas where he initiated his medical studies before completing them at the University of Edinburgh. Upon receiving his degree, he

practiced in Dublin, London and Paris. He returned to Texas with the outbreak of war and served as a surgeon in Hood's Brigade. After the war,

¹²⁴⁴ Henry, Mary Davis and Anne Henry Tidmore. [Forest Home: the Annals of Ann Fennell Davis](#). 2005, p. 43, p. 46.

¹²⁴⁵ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, n.p.

¹²⁴⁶ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 89; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 65, p. 19; [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, pp. 105-106.

¹²⁴⁷ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 35.

he practiced medicine in Gonzalez and served on the Texas State Board of Medical Examiners.¹²⁴⁸ John Emmett Vinson graduated in 1857. Other students known to have matriculated during this interval were J. T. Strain (1856-1859), Henry D. Long (1856), William H. Freeman (1855-57), J. C. W. Steger (1855), Matthew A. Gray (1856), Richard R. Davis (1857) Benjamin Fuller (1856), Robert T. Ware (1856), and [Fox Delony](#), son of trustee Edward Brodnax Delony (1856). [Wilbur Davis](#), the brother of Absalom, John Summerfield Davis, and Francis Mark Davis also attended.¹²⁴⁹

La Grange Re-tooled: La Grange College and Polytechnic Institute.

Only the generosity of the trustees kept the college open in these lean first years after the 1855 departure of the Methodists. The buildings were in disrepair from long deferred maintenance and there were more schools competing for the limited pool of qualified potential students. Survival required a transformation, something to distinguish La Grange from its Florence Wesleyan competitor, and an immediate infusion of support from the state of Alabama.

State support was not yet forthcoming, and design and marketing messages were still unfocused in early 1857. Trustees proposed to retain the classical emphasis with an enriched the scientific component and the addition of a military component. The name of the institution was changed to **La Grange College and Polytechnic Institute**. President Felix Johnson was moved aside and appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy. Thus read the notice in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 30, 1857:

*Col. James D. Cobb has been elected President of LaGrange College, Ala, Rev. Felix Johnson resigning, but continuing in the institution as one of the professors. In addition to being a literary college, the trustees have made it a Southern Polytechnic Institution, with **military drills** and scientific gymnastics. The trustees have raised as an endowment fund \$32,500.*¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁸ Daniel, I. E. [Personnel of the Texas State Government: with sketches of representative men of Texas](#). San Antonio: Maverick Printing House, 1892, pp. 397-400; McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 17.

¹²⁴⁹ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 90.

¹²⁵⁰ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 30, 1857.

The appointment of the 68 year-old [James Dyer Cobb](#), United States Military Academy 1811, (1789 -) was doomed from the start. Most recently before coming to La Grange, Cobb held appointments in mathematics at [Franklin College](#) (1854-55) Mississippi, and [Andrew College](#) (1856), Tennessee. To implement the military component, Cobb brought along his nephew as drillmaster and adjutant. He had seven children or so with his wife Rachael, whom he married in 1817. It is not clear if she accompanied him to La Grange. Albert Alexander McGregor was professor of mathematics during Cobb's brief presence. Usually generous in his comments, McGregor was unsparing in his criticism of Cobb, painting a picture of a frail and doddering man, "fretful as a sick child and almost devoid of reason."¹²⁵¹ Harsh in his discipline and unpopular with the student body, Cobb was burned in effigy. Trustee [John Towns Abernathy](#), met with Cobb and counseled him to retire. He did so immediately. He and his nephew left La Grange, and the trustees continued their retooling.¹²⁵²

With Cobb's departure, instruction was suspended while maintenance was performed and an additional building for the cadets was constructed. Two stories tall with a basement, the building contained the armories of the military school as well as the offices of the Superintendent and the Commandant. On its first floor were the library and the facilities of the two library literary societies. The library was of not inconsiderable size, about 4,000 volumes—this after the departure of the original college to Florence.¹²⁵³ The society rooms in the new building and the chapel on the second floor also functioned as classrooms. In the basement was a room for cadet mattress manufacture. The new building was made of brick sourced from a Florence brickyard and the carpentry was performed by Cicero Roberts of Tuscumbia.¹²⁵⁴

¹²⁵¹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 17, as quoted by Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p.89.

¹²⁵² McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 23.

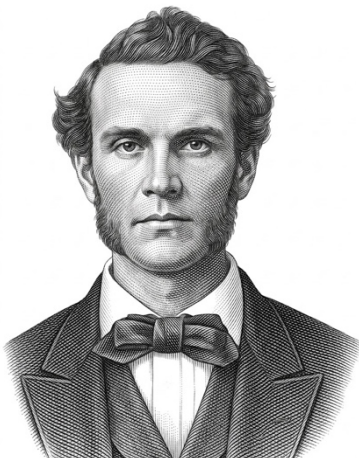
¹²⁵³ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 11.

¹²⁵⁴ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 91.

La Grange College and Military Academy.

In February¹²⁵⁵ or September¹²⁵⁶ (accounts differ) 1858, the school was re-opened under yet another name: **La Grange College and Military Academy**. In his research, Robert Steen addresses reports that the grounds and property of the college were appropriated by the state of Alabama at this time, and concludes he was unable to find documentation of that act. The closest affirmation of state ownership comes from a recollection of Absalom Davis's daughter Mary Elizabeth Henry that a deal had been struck. The buildings and grounds of the former denominational college were taken over by the state, she said, and a military component was added. Mary was not born until twenty years after the reported occurrence, and in her memory, the transfer was a bit earlier:

*The La Grange buildings were literally presented to the state in 1856, and the legislature promptly had accepted them with a nod of thanks and had immediately opened the school again with military features introduced. To the state this gift was a windfall, for North and South politics had become a simmering cauldron of hatred.*¹²⁵⁷



99 Major James Walthall Robertson

Major James Walthall Robertson (1830-1911) was brought in as Superintendent and Professor of Engineering. The new Commandant of Cadets and Professor of Drawing was Captain William Henry Hunt. The fiscal state of the institution remained perilous as trustees and politicians negotiated with the state of Alabama for support, military scholarships, and military equipment.¹²⁵⁸

Robertson was an 1850 graduate of the [South Carolina Military Academy](#), today known as The Citadel. Upon graduation, he sandwiched the role of Commandant of Cadets at Georgia Military

¹²⁵⁵ "[La Grange Military Academy, 1857-1862](#)" *La Grange Historic Site.Org*. Online. Accessed January 26, 2026

¹²⁵⁶ Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p. 92.

¹²⁵⁷ Henry, Mary Davis and Anne Henry Tidmore. [Forest Home: the Annals of Ann Fennell Davis](#). 2005, p.32.

¹²⁵⁸ "[La Grange Military Academy, 1857-1862](#)" *La Grange Historic Site.Org*. Online. Accessed January 26, 2026

Academy between employment in the private sector as a civil engineer.¹²⁵⁹
As John Allan Wyeth describes, Robertson was respected by the cadets:

*He was a gentleman of commanding presence, dignified, kind and just, and discharged the duties of his difficult position with general satisfaction. He was especially generous in dealing with those, who, for breaches of discipline or deficiency in study had been posted on the bulletin board, which, on every Saturday morning was placed in the foyer of the main building. In his office in the chapel building, he granted an audience to all offenders who were permitted to offer excuses and secure, if possible, the cancellation of demerits. If it were a first offence and the cadet seemed repentant, or if there were any doubt as to the justice of the marks received, he always leaned to the side of forgiveness.*¹²⁶⁰

After the war, his civil engineering skills were employed in the rebuilding of the war-torn south. He had a role in the reconstruction of the [Western & Atlantic Railroad](#) and was Chief Engineer of Alabama's [South and North Railroad](#) and the Georgia Western Railroad. Subsequently he served as superintendent of the [Macon & Brunswick Railroad](#). In 1874 he became president of the Roswell Manufacturing Company, of Roswell, Ga., and in 1884 built the plant of the Porter Manufacturing Company, near Clarksville, Ga. In the 1880's, Georgia's governor, [John Brown Gordon](#) appointed him the state Railway Commissioner. In 1899, at the age of 69, he was appointed Adjutant General of the state of Georgia, a position he held for three years.¹²⁶¹ His obituary observed that few men in Georgia were better known than Robertson. While he had steadfastly refused to seek elective office, he was persuaded to stand for the U. S. Senate seat eventually won by [Alexander Stevens Clay](#).¹²⁶²

William Henry Hunt (1837-1862) graduated from the Georgia Military Institute in 1858, first in his class. As a student he captained one of the student military corps of the institute and upon graduation, the GMI's Commandant of Cadets position became vacant,

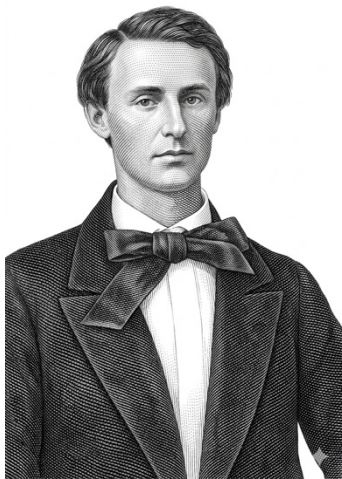
100 Capt. William Henry Hunt

¹²⁵⁹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 27; Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 35-36.

¹²⁶⁰ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 38.

¹²⁶¹ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 37.

¹²⁶² "[Col. James Walthall Robertson](#)." *Find a Grave*. Attached obituary Atlanta Telegraph Bureau dated March 6, 1911. Accessed January 28, 2026



100 Capt. William Henry Hunt

Hunt was promoted into that post before graduation. Upon his graduation, he assumed the duties of Commandant of Cadets at La Grange. Wyeth was a great admirer of Captain Hunt, remarking that his youthfulness and inherent forbearance made him a favorite of the cadets. He remarked favorably of his measured temperament while maintaining discipline and control. Wyeth said precision of cadet drill under Hunt's cadence was superior to that of West Point or the New York 7th Regiment that he often observed as an adult. He enjoyed Hunt's drawing class and placed first there among the students. In his memoir he recounts

Hunt's mentorship of his oration in an elocution contest in which he placed second to a more polished presentation by Preston Player, mentored by Professor Edward Goodwin. His book on the history of the military academy is dedicated to Professor William Henry Hunt.¹²⁶³

Joining Robertson on the faculty of La Grange Military Academy were carryovers Felix Johnson, now Chaplin and Professor of Mental and Moral Science; Edward Goodwin, Professor of Languages and Literature; and Albert Alexander McGregor, Professor of Mathematics. Bluford Martin Faris, educated at La Grange, was made McGregor's assistant. Faris was close to Felix Johnson prepared for the ministry under his tutelage. William Graves Williams continued to teach Chemistry and Natural Sciences.¹²⁶⁴

Relatively new to the staff was [Dr. Alfred W. Stephenson](#) (1826-1896), Surgeon.¹²⁶⁵ John Allan Wyeth in his history suggests that Stephenson came to La Grange in 1856 when the surgeon position was created. John Calvin Stephenson, head of the Preparatory School in 1856, could have put in a good word for his relative.¹²⁶⁶ Stephenson would have

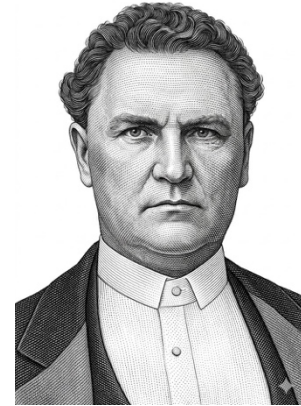
¹²⁶³ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907

¹²⁶⁴ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 10, p. 49-51.

¹²⁶⁵ J. C. Stephenson. [The Stephenson Family](#). Privately published. 1906, p. 75.

¹²⁶⁶ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 51-55.

tended the cadets from a new hospital funded by William Willis Garth, adjacent to the new cadet building. Stephenson remained at La Grange until its closure, and his family witnessed the campus destruction by Cornyn's troops. After the war he practiced medicine in western Tennessee and was active in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church until his death.¹²⁶⁷



101 Dr. Alfred W.
Stephenson

The hospital donor, [William Willis Garth](#) (1826-1912) was the son of [General Jesse and Unity Spotswood Garth](#).¹²⁶⁸ He attended Emory and Henry, and some sources suggest he earned a degree there.¹²⁶⁹ After Emory & Henry, he entered La Grange College as a senior and graduated in 1847. His brother [Winston](#) also attended La Grange, graduating in 1849.¹²⁷⁰ He subsequently studied law at the University of Virginia. In school with him were several of his La Grange classmates: Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, DeWitt Clinton Greenwood, Richard Rhodes, Rice Winter, and George Steele. His sister, Mary Francis "Molly" Garth married John Gregg, William's classmate at La Grange in 1858, the time when the hospital was being built.¹²⁷¹ By the time that La Grange was entering its military phase, Garth had become a passionate secessionist and helped raise troops for the 35th Alabama Infantry. As did William Basil Wood,

¹²⁶⁷ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 53.

¹²⁶⁸ "[Gen. William Winston Garth](#)." *Find a Grave*. Online. Accessed February 2, 2026; Owen, Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 640-41; [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 770. Some sources suggest the General himself donated the La Grange hospital.

¹²⁶⁹ "[Col. William Willis Garth](#)." Huntsville History Collection.Org. Online. Accessed January 26, 2026; Owen, Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 643.

¹²⁷⁰ McGregor, Albert Alexander. P. 31.

¹²⁷¹ Owen, Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 643; Hobbs, Thomas Hubbard. [The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs. A Contemporary Record of an Aristocrat from Athens, Alabama Written Between 1840, When the Diarist was Fourteen Years Old and 1862 When He Died Serving the Confederate States of America](#). Faye A. Axford, ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976, p. 887.

Garth served on General Longstreet's staff through the war. After the war, he represented Alabama's 8th district in the U. S. Congress, 1877-79.¹²⁷²

Relationship to the State of Alabama. If Alabama did not assume title to the buildings and grounds of the college, the legislature did come to its rescue. On January 26, 1860, Act 111 of the Third Biennial Session of the Alabama Legislature provided the Superintendent of the College a brass cannon, one hundred "new regulation muskets," and twenty five tents (a guard tent, 3 officer tents and 21 company tents).¹²⁷³ Act 112 established the provision of providing continuously scholarships for two cadets from each county to attend either La Grange Military Academy or the Military School at Glennville (Barbour County). The commissioner court would decide to which school the cadet would be assigned. Critically, the state would pay the school, \$250 per annum (accessible in two increments) to defray the expenses of each cadet.¹²⁷⁴ As if the trajectory of the college had never altered its arc, Act 224 changed the name of the institution from La Grange College to La Grange Military Academy.¹²⁷⁵ The act made no mention of Florence Wesleyan University.

In his book on the academy, Wyeth lists the trustees (1862) as [John Townsend Abernathy](#), Dr. [Edward Brodnax Delony](#), Professor Edward Goodwin, William Hooks, T. B. Jenkins, [Oswald King](#), [Philemon King](#), [Hartwell Richard King Jr.](#), [Robert King](#), [Dr. George Ernst Kumpe](#), R. B. Long, [Dr. John Smith Napier](#), [Warren Washington Peden](#), [Col. Richard Preuit](#), [Parker Nathaniel Greene \(P. N. G.\) Rand](#), [Abraham Ricks](#), [Maclin Sledge](#), C. A. Torrey, and Col. [Fletcher Curtis Vinson](#). The distance members, prominent but typically exerting less day-to-day influence were [Frank Mark Davis](#), [James Webb Smith Donnell](#), Henry Fennell, [Gen. Jesse Winston Garth](#), [John Calvin Goodloe](#), John Hobgood, Dr. N. J. Huston, John H.

¹²⁷² "[Col. William Willis Garth.](#)" Huntsville History Collection.Org. Online. Accessed January 26, 2026; Thomas Hartwell and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 643.

¹²⁷³ "[111] An Act to Provide La Grange Military Academy with Arms, and for Other Purposes." [Acts of the 7th Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama](#). Montgomery: Shorter and Reid State Printers. 1860, p. 90. Internet Archive.

¹²⁷⁴ "[112] An Act to Provide for the Military Education of Two Young Men from each County in the State of Alabama" [Acts of the 7th Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama](#). Montgomery: Shorter and Reid State Printers. 1860, p. 91 Internet Archive.

¹²⁷⁵ "[224] An Amend the Charter of La Grange College" [Acts of the 7th Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama](#). Montgomery: Shorter and Reid State Printers. 1860, pp. 315-16. Internet Archive.

McGaughey, [Col. Felix Grundy Norman](#), [Thomas Minott Peters](#), [Hon. Richard Orrick Pickett](#), John W. Rutland, [Hon. John Burrus Sale](#), [John Sevier](#), Capt. J. G. Shine, [Dr. Francis Winfield Sykes](#), [Dr. Andrew Jackson “Jack” Sykes](#), and John Williams.¹²⁷⁶

While the Alabama legislature recognized the La Grange Military Academy by name and authorized state cadet enrollment and support in the 1859–60 session and during the war years, no act located between 1857 and 1862 incorporates the institution by naming a statutory roster of trustees. The silence of the published Acts on trustee composition suggests that the board Wyeth lists for 1862 was not constituted by statute but instead operated as a *private corporate board* maintained outside legislative appointment. This inference accords with a common governance form in nineteenth-century American education: colleges, academies, and denominational schools were frequently chartered—or continued in practice—as private corporations whose trustees filled vacancies internally and thus perpetuated the board by cooptation. The classic statement of that model appears in the Dartmouth College case, which treated the college corporation as vested in trustees “appointed by themselves” with the power to fill vacancies; and Southern precedents show the same arrangement in practice, as in Randolph-Macon’s 1830 charter establishing an independent, self-perpetuating board. In La Grange’s case, the legislature supplied arms and paid for state cadets but appears not to have asserted comparable control over governance, leaving institutional direction in the hands of a locally rooted oligarchy that could reproduce itself as circumstances required.¹²⁷⁷

¹²⁷⁶ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 10. Wyeth does not credit the source of his listing.

¹²⁷⁷ See *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 518 (1819) (noting that, “By the charter, the trustees had a right to fill vacancies in their own number ... [and] they and their successors, appointed by themselves, were forever to hold the property”); Hohner, Robert A. “[Southern Education in Transition: William Waugh Smith, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Methodist Church](#).” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 1987), pp. 181-203 (here, Randolph-Macon’s 1830 charter provided for “an independent and self-perpetuating board of trustees”); Rudolph, Frederick. [The American College and University: A History. Introductory Essay and Supplemental Bibliography](#) by John R. Thelin. (especially discussion of governance and trustee authority in early American colleges) Online version created by Plunkett Lake Press, December 2021. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990. Original copyright, 1962

Two conclusions can be drawn from the composition of the board. First, the elite of the south side of the Valley (Leighton, Courtland, La Grange, Courtland), the planter and professional class, remained loyal to and supportive of the proposition to advance higher education on the mountain. And secondly, the denominational absence speaks to the inclination of two parties. The secular elite certainly had no interest in renewing contact with the Methodist Church that fostered the removal of their first institution to Florence. Likewise, the Methodist Church, amidst the expanding number of Methodist and other denomination institutions, had no wish to accept the prospect of sustaining another.

Certainly, the state scholarships had their beneficial impact. John Allan Wyeth wrote that in 1860, of the 170 cadets enrolled, 47 were state cadets. At the end of his distinguished career, he remained impressed with the quality of his first year of higher education at La Grange Military Academy:

*The teaching was of the highest grade, the discipline was strict, but never unjustly severe; the students, almost without exception earnest, honest and manly fellows of fine physical and mental development, and but for the unhappy war, which involved this school in its trail of destruction, it would without doubt have ranked higher each year as one of the greatest educational institutions in the South and of inestimable value in the moral and mental training of her people.*¹²⁷⁸

Lifestyle. Daily student life changed less than might be expected. James Sellers observed that the institution of the cadet corps at the University of Alabama did promote order and quell the propensity for violence that had plagued that campus. And the discipline imposed by Robertson and Hunt likely had that effect at La Grange. Wyeth recounted some of the drudgery of cadet life: reveille, the rush to dress, the dash to roll call to avoid a tardiness or absence demerit. There were floors to dust, bunks to be made, folded and placed against the wall to create space. To fetch water and wood and to accept responsibility for the cleanliness of the quarters was certainly a lifestyle change for privileged youth. Unlike the commissary rowdiness chronicled earlier, the cadets marched to the mess hall and were seated ten to a table, five on each side. Officers presided at

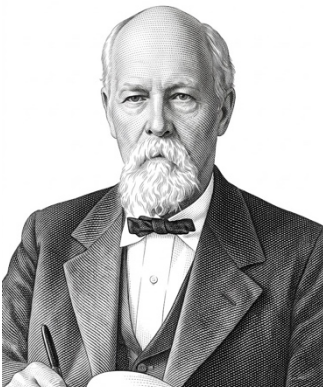
¹²⁷⁸ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857.*](#) New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 10-11.

the head and foot of the table, and the ranking student officer was responsible for the table's deportment.¹²⁷⁹

After breakfast, the cadets marched to class and recitation until noon. After the hour break for "dinner", there were further recitations and study until 5. After the academics an hour of infantry or artillery drill followed and at 6 p.m., the corps marched in dress review before the commandant. Breaking ranks, the cadets then returned to quarters and stowed their weaponry, returning to campus for supper.¹²⁸⁰ Saturday was full dress parade, a far cry from the naive efforts of George Meridyth Peek at Florence Wesleyan with his charges lacking both weaponry and uniforms. As Wyeth relates:

*On Saturday morning we had full dress parade and inspection, in which the most careful scrutiny was made, not only of every article of clothing as to strict personal cleanliness, but of the arms and accoutrements, belt plates and gun trimmings. Time and time again I have seen Captain Hunt take a gun from one of the cadets, run the ram rod down to the breech, withdraw it and ask the cadet to hold out his hand covered by the snow white glove we were required to have on parade. If the slightest stain of rust or powder marked the glove, a reprimand was given, and if upon the next inspection the fault was not remedied the cadet was reported for neglect of duty.*¹²⁸¹

The state cadet at the head of Company B, with the reputation of best-maintained weapon and uniform was Holland Middleton Bell, of Fayette County. There was no way of knowing any Saturday on that review ground that Holly Bell would, at his death in 1943, be



102 Judge Holland Middleton Bell

¹²⁷⁹ Sellers, James Benson . [*History of the University of Alabama*](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902.

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

¹²⁸⁰ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 94-96.

¹²⁸¹ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 94-96.

remembered as Alabama's "last Confederate officer."¹²⁸²

The fields of La Grange were also the place of play as well as drill. Since 1830, La Grange students gamboled and competed not in "organized" athletics in the modern sense but in a repertoire of inherited Anglo-American yard games whose rules were customary rather than codified, and whose enforcement rested in peer judgments rather than faculty or adult oversight. John Allan Wyeth's recollection of a version of student football—a contest in which a ball cleanly caught on the fly might be advanced by running, but which, once grounded, could only be moved by kicking it until again lofted airborne and secured—placed La Grange squarely within the transitional football culture shared by English public schools and American campuses before mid-century standardization. Such hybrid handling-and-kicking play was widely reported at Harvard, Yale and Virginia during the 1840s and 1850s, only later separating into the distinct codes of rugby, soccer and American football.

At La Grange, as at other institutions, the game required little more than an open field and a leather ball. Yet it also demanded stamina, agility and a willingness to endure forceful contact—qualities contemporaries readily equated with youthful manliness. At the University of Alabama, the strapping Oran Roberts soon established a reputation for his athletic prowess. Alongside football, the students practiced "foot and a half," a leapfrog variant in which each successful vault lengthened the required clearance by measured increments, testing balance and nerve while subjecting failure to good-natured ridicule. Both football and foot and a half belonged to the standard nineteenth-century playground repertoire rather than to any uniquely local invention, and together they reveal a college world in which physical play functioned less as a spectacle than as ritualized fellowship and character training.¹²⁸³

¹²⁸² Armistead, Gene. "[Judge Holly Bell: The Biography of Alabama's Last Confederate Soldier](#)." *Alabama Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (July 1917), pp. 247-264; Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 71.

¹²⁸³ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 97-98; Lewis, Guy. "[The Beginning of Organized Collegiate Sport](#)," *American Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (January 1970), pp. 222-229; Smith, Ronald A. [The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 3-20; Bancroft, Jessie H. [Games for the Playground, Home, School and Gymnasium](#). New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922; Roberts, O. W.

By the mid-1850s these informal recreations did not disappear but existed side by side with a new and more deliberate regimen: adult-directed military drill. At La Grange—as at the University of Alabama and other residential colleges during the sectional crisis—the commons might host an improvised football match in the morning and a supervised company drill on the same ground later in the day. The difference lay not in the bodily exertion but in the source of authority. Yard games remained student-governed and episodic; drill imposed cadence, hierarchy, and obedience under faculty or appointed officers. Together they formed a complementary culture of discipline. Football and vaulting cultivated courage and endurance before one's peers; drill translated those virtues into ordered ranks and collective movement, preparing young men for the militia ethos increasingly celebrated across the South. By contrast, Florence Wesleyan's distinctive decision to forego dormitories and dining halls, praised as protection against the dissipation of boarding life, moderated this process by keeping many students within the family household. Yet the commuter arrangement also may have thinned the dense web of daily association—shared study hours, evening society meetings and constant peer oversight—through which both games and drill generated cohesion and institutional identity. In time, the world that Wyeth described would yield to scheduled institutional sport. The first University of Alabama football game against Auburn would take place in the 1890s, and the rough commons contests of an earlier time would become the regulated spectacles of the modern colleges.¹²⁸⁴

At 6 P.M. Commandant of Cadets William Henry Hunt and his two student company leaders, Captain Napier and Captain Thad Felton—sons of Valley elite--would lead the two companies of 85 cadets each in dress parade. Napier captained Company A, and Felton, Company B. John Smith Napier, Jr. was the son of trustee [Dr. John Smith Napier](#) and Mary Curtis Myatt Napier. The heavy infantry Company A drilled with long percussion muskets fixed with bayonets, probably the standard [Model 1842](#) musket then distributed from state arsenals. Company A followed Winfield Scott's

Reminiscences O. W. Roberts While a Student at the University of Alabama, from February 1833 to December 1836. Presented to the Eurosophic Society, University of Alabama, May 30, 1892.

¹²⁸⁴ Lewis, Guy. "[The Beginning of Organized Collegiate Sport](#)," *American Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (January 1970), pp. 224-227; Smith, Ronald A. [The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 21-36.

Infantry Tactics manual.¹²⁸⁵ John Allan Wyeth marched in Captain Felton's Company B. [Thaddeus Felton](#) was the son of [Thaddeus William Felton](#) and his wife [Martha Burchet King](#). The light infantry Company B bore the [Model 1841](#) musket, or "Mississippi Rifle." That the company marched without bayonets suggests the armory may have provided them with the earlier .54 caliber version, which had no bayonet fitting. Company B marched under Hardee's *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* manual.¹²⁸⁶ The distinction Wyeth drew was doctrinal rather than decorative: one unit trained for mobility and independent fire, the other for close-order line combat. That these were not mere parade pieces is confirmed by the Alabama legislature's act of January 26, 1860, which furnished the institution with a brass field piece, one hundred "new regulation muskets," and tents for a full encampment while authorizing the enrollment of state-supported cadets. In effect, La Grange functioned as a contracted training ground for the militia. The contrast with nearby Florence Wesleyan is striking: There, drilling—if attempted at all—relied on wooden substitutes rather than serviceable arms. At La Grange, by contrast, tactically trained students handled the very weapons many would soon carry into Confederate ranks.

Meanwhile, over in Tuscaloosa, [Landon C. Garland](#), who became president of the University of Alabama in 1855, lobbied the trustees and the legislature for the creation of a corps of cadets and the imposition of a system of military discipline, approved by the legislature in February 1860, which was adopted by the board of trustees in July 1860.¹²⁸⁷ The entire student body entering in the fall The students became cadets wearing military uniforms. The change had an immediate impact. As Garland had foreseen, the discipline and drills, with student officers enforcing the rules quickly improved student discipline, class performance and attendance.¹²⁸⁸ In January 1861, Commandant Caleb Huse arranged to take his cadets by steamboat from Tuscaloosa to Mobile to Montgomery for review by the

¹²⁸⁵ **Winfield Scott**, [Infantry Tactics; or, Rules for the Exercise and Manœuvres of the United States' Infantry](#). New York: George Dearborn, 1835

¹²⁸⁶ **William J. Hardee**, [Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics: For the Exercise and Manœuvres of Troops When Acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen](#). New Orleans: H. P. Lathrop, 1861.

¹²⁸⁷ [Acts of the 7th Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama](#). Montgomery: Shorter and Reid State Printers. 1860. Act 31 (p. 25) established a military department at the University of Alabama, February 23, 1860.

¹²⁸⁸ "[University of Alabama](#)," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed February 1, 2026.

Governor and the General Assembly. The change in behavior of the students and the precision of their drill earned the admiration of all, earning the next day a suspension of the rules and the legislative augmentation of the university endowment. As members of the Alabama corps of cadets, the students were a part of the state military. When the war became a reality, they were given enlisted state in the Confederate Army.¹²⁸⁹

Yet the marching of the cadets off to war must be considered a failure. The legislature's purpose in subsidizing La Grange's cadet corps was not simply to place more muskets in youthful hands but to create a reservoir of trained instructors. Throughout the South, military schools were valued less as sources of privates than as incubators of non-commissioned officers and drillmasters who could impart Hardee's and Scott's tactics to the flood of volunteers then marshaling in the counties. [Governor Andrew Barry Moore](#) (1807-1873) made that perspective unambiguously to Superintendent Robertson when after Fort Sumpter, the latter wrote the governor whether it was time to abandon the Academy and send everyone into active service. Said Moore:

The country has greater need for you and your corps of cadets where you are than anywhere else just at this juncture. It is not merely good raw material that we need so much now as trained men and men capable of training others.

I sincerely hope that neither your own ardor nor the pressure from a body of enthusiastic young men, whose patriotic hearts burn with a desire for what is called 'active service,' will induce you to take a step which I should consider so much to be regretted.

*I am anxious above all things, to keep our military institutions organized that they may furnish to our armies as they are needed trained military men. It is impossible to do this unless both teachers and cadets will patriotically repress this passion for the field only, and each work for the holy cause in his appointed sphere.*¹²⁹⁰

A single trained cadet might prepare a company of raw recruits in a matter of weeks, and Alabama's provision of arms, tents, and scholarships suggests precisely this expectation: that La Grange would continue in operation as a school even while war raged, supplying discipline and method to the state's

¹²⁸⁹ Sellers, James Benson . [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vo1. 1, 1818-1902.

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., p. 260.

¹²⁹⁰ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 36.

expanding forces. Geography, however, defeated policy. North Alabama became an early theater of operations, its railroads and river crossings exposed to Federal movement, and both Tuscaloosa and the Tennessee Valley towns were repeatedly threatened. A hilltop campus containing cannon, muskets, and several hundred young men was no longer a training ground but a vulnerable depot. Under such conditions the academy could not safely remain open.¹²⁹¹

When instruction ceased in 1862, the matériel furnished by the state—arms held in the custody of the Superintendent rather than owned by the college—probably passed back into militia control. In a region urgently arming new regiments and lacking nearby arsenals, the simplest solution was immediate redistribution. The officers who had commanded the cadet battalion—Robertson, Hunt, and Goodwin—entered Confederate service with the 35th Alabama Infantry, many former cadets joining their ranks. It is therefore highly probable that the Mississippi rifles and bayoneted muskets once inspected on the parade ground were issued directly to that regiment. One soldier wrote in his memoirs that when the 35th Alabama Infantry, to avoid premature contact with Union troops, departed La Grange hurriedly on April 14, 1862 while still organizing, they had almost no equipment, “except ... a few old guns and cartridges in Company B.”¹²⁹² The transition from school to army required little more than a change of roll call. The same ground that had hosted football and leapfrog, then drill and dress parade, became at last the regiment’s first armory and mustering field.

The first seven Confederate states met February 4, 1861, and its troops fired on Fort Sumpter on April 12. By April, La Grange cadets were resigning from school and returning to their homes to enlist in companies being raised. By session commencement on July 5, a quarter of the student body had already resigned. One of the La Grange cadets, Fielding Bradford (1842-1861), enlisted early in the 4th Alabama Infantry as had Norman Briggs of Florence Wesleyan. Like Briggs, Bradford was killed at Manassas

¹²⁹¹ Goodloe, Rev. Albert Theodore. [*Confederate Echoes: A Voice from the South in the Days of secession and of the Southern Confederacy*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1907, p. 80.

¹²⁹² Goodloe, Rev. Albert Theodore. [*Confederate Echoes: A Voice from the South in the Days of secession and of the Southern Confederacy*](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1907, p. 80.

(Bull Run) in July 1861.¹²⁹³ When school re-opened for the second session on February 5, Wyeth and his father decided he should not return as the Union army was already pressing into the Valley. The decision to close the Academy came quickly afterward, March 1. On campus, the remaining students provided a willing nucleus for the 35th Alabama Infantry, which was being formed there, the college facilities providing shelter and training quarters as it was being formed.¹²⁹⁴

The 35th Infantry was formed from volunteers from Franklin, Lawrence, Limestone and Madison counties. William Willis Garth who built the hospital for the Academy and whose sister was married to John Gregg, helped raised troops for the 35th even as he was unable to serve himself.¹²⁹⁵ The regiment initially consisted of about 750 men, leaving La Grange before it was fully organized because of reports of approaching Union troops. It would see first action in Louisiana, fought and suffered losses at Corinth and Champion's Hill, and sustained heavy casualties at Atlanta and Franklin. Only 55 officers and men surrendered in April 1865.¹²⁹⁶ Three of its commanding officers were drawn from the faculty of La Grange Military Academy. Superintendent Robertson became the first commander of the 35th Alabama Infantry Regiment, with the rank of Colonel. Faculty member Edward Goodwin was awarded the rank of Colonel as well, and William H. Hunt was appointed as Lieutenant Colonel. Of the three, only Robertson

¹²⁹³ Wyeth, John Allan. [*History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, \[and\] La Grange College 1830 – 1857*](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, p. 101; “W,” [*4th Alabama Infantry, On the Battle and Casualties*](#), *The Fourth Alabama Regiment at the Battle of Manassas*. *Bull Runnings: A Digitization of a Civil War Battle*. Online. Accessed February 1, 2026.

¹²⁹⁴ Among the cadets that joined the 35th Infantry were Thaddeus Felton, Charles Hardy (son of the deceased La Grange President, W. W. Baker, Friend Bates, Richard Beaumont, James Malvern Clopton, W.P. Cockrill, John “Parks” Cooper, Lowe A. Dement, William Eason, Daniel B. Friend, M. R. Haley, William A. Hansell, J. W. Harmon, Scott Harrington, John H. Harris, Arthur P. Hennigan, Dallas Hennigan, James Polk Hennigan, J. Horn, L. Matthews, Frank Neal, Frederick Nelson, William H. Pope, Gayden H. Russell, Joseph Nicholas Thompson, Robert Emmett Wiggins, M.R. Haley, George Campbell Hubbard, Frederick Mosley Nelson, Thomas W. Peebles, Walter Robert Pruitt, Felix Alonzo McKenzie Sherrod, Reuben M. Spivey, Samuel D. Stewart, W. H. Strother, Columbus Sykes, Joseph Nicholas Thompaon, Jake Battle, Sam Torian, Fountain Armistead, John Wesley Maddin and Buford Martin Faris, Columbus. (John Allan Wyeth and various sources).

¹²⁹⁵ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 50.

¹²⁹⁶ The National Park Service. [“The Civil War. Battle Unit Details. Confederate Alabama Troops. 35th Regiment, Alabama Infantry”](#).

survived the war.¹²⁹⁷ After health issues forced Robertson to resign from his role in a combat unit, Edward Goodwin became commander of the regiment earning the respect of his troops for his leadership at Corinth, Champion's Hill and elsewhere. Goodwin would die abruptly while attending a military tribunal in Columbus, Mississippi.¹²⁹⁸ The randomness of war would also claim Major William Henry Hunt. In 1862, Hunt was elected Lieutenant Colonel in a Georgia regiment assigned to the Army of Northern Virginia. En route to his unit, he stopped to visit relatives in Marietta, Georgia, contracted typhoid, and died before reaching his destination.¹²⁹⁹

The vagaries of war would soon devastate the campus and the village of La Grange. On April 15, General Dodge launched a three week expedition into the Tennessee Valley. April 28, 1863, the notorious [Colonel Florence Cornyn](#) (1829-1863), known as "The Fighting Doctor," torched La Grange Military Academy campus and the village. Beginning the Civil War as a surgeon, he assumed command of the 10th Missouri Cavalry in September 1862. Soldiers of the 10th Missouri Cavalry, accompanied by elements such as the 7th Kansas Cavalry, burned the academy and supporting village structures during an extended raid. The attack occurred amid broader Union movements in the Tennessee Valley aimed at disrupting Confederate resources and communications; reports contemporary to the period and later compiled histories note that *the college buildings and an associated library (of about 4,000 volumes) were deliberately destroyed by federal troops* as they pushed through the region. The action reflected heightened Union willingness to target educational and military sites perceived as aiding the Confederate war

¹²⁹⁷ Goodloe, Rev. Albert Theodore. [Confederate Echoes: A Voice from the South in the Days of secession and of the Southern Confederacy](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1907, p. 87.

¹²⁹⁸ Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, {and} La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 46-50. Why Goodwin was in Columbus is not immediately apparent. However, an [Action Report](#) he filed on May 28, 1863, when the 35th Infantry attempt while advancing with fixed bayonets, to rally other units fleeing through its ranks, suggests he was there to testify at a court martial. Confederate courts-martial for straggling and unauthorized retreat were common following the Vicksburg campaign. Goodwin died at Columbus, Mississippi, 25 September 1863, while attending a court-martial.

¹²⁹⁹ McGregor, A. A. *History of LaGrange College* 1904, p. 46. Wyeth, John Allan. [History of La Grange Military Academy and the Cadet Corps, 1857 – 1862, {and} La Grange College 1830 – 1857](#). New York: The Brewer Press, 1907, pp. 43-44.

effort. Eyewitness and secondary accounts from cavalymen of the time describe a scorched-earth attitude among some of the raiders, with little distinction between purely civilian and strategic installations in contested areas.¹³⁰⁰ One soldier noted in his diaries, that La Grange “...was plundered of its uniforms and then burned. The boys made a gay appearance with cocked hats, etc., which many of them gaily wore”.¹³⁰¹

La Grange’s fate paralleled that of the *University of Alabama* in Tuscaloosa. By the final year of the war the university functioned largely as a military school, its students organized as cadets and many already serving as Confederate officers. In April 1865 Union cavalry under [Brigadier General John T. Croxton](#) burned nearly the entire campus, sparing only a handful of structures such as the President’s Mansion and Gorgas House. As at La Grange, the destruction reflected not simple vandalism but a strategic judgment: educational institutions closely aligned with Confederate military preparation were treated as war infrastructure and destroyed accordingly. Virginia Military Institute and [Georgia Military Institute](#) were likewise put to the torch.¹³⁰²

The incursion into North Alabama coincided with the adoption of a “hard war” military policy, willfully targeting non-combatant property. The foray into the Valley also aimed to destroy agricultural produce and eliminate farm animals that would sustain Confederate soldiers. The same diarist wrote that in the area around Tuscumbia and La Grange those days, troops laid waste with fire and sword, the country through which we passed, houses, barns, cribs, mills, etc., all share one fate.” One farm in the region was spared, as the son of the farm owner served in the unit. “His residence and other buildings,” he wrote, “remained like an island amid the surrounding ruin. I was pleased to be able to do him a kindness.” Amidst the total conflagration that was sweeping the countryside the diarist related to one of the 7th Kansas “Destroying Angels” to General Dodge’s order to burn only those buildings containing grain. “Well,” he reported

¹³⁰⁰ Wallace, Harry E. *History of the Shoals. Lauderdale County Alabama: History*. A series published in four parts in the *Florence Times-Daily*, February 25, 1999 [Part 4](#).

¹³⁰¹ Jackson, Oscar L. [The Colonel’s Diary. Journals Kept Before and During the Civil War....](#) No publication place, date, circa 1922, p. 93.

¹³⁰² Couper, William. [One Hundred Years at V. M. I](#) Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1939., p. 303; “[Croxton’s Raid](#).” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed February 4, 2026; “[Georgia Military Institute](#).” *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed February 4, 2026.

the Jayhawker's reply, "if a building has no grain in it, just put in a little."¹³⁰³ Cornyn would not survive the Civil War, meeting an untimely end at court martial.¹³⁰⁴

In his report from Corinth on May 5, General Dodge reported on the extent of the degradation of the Valley. One and a half million bushels of corn along with more oats, rye and fodder were destroyed, and half a million pounds of bacon were put to the flames. A thousand horses were taken, along with an equal number of cows—feeding the command for three weeks. The army has "rendered desolate," he declared, "one of the best granaries in the South, preventing them from raising another crop this year, and taking away from them some 1,500 negroes." Tuscumbia and Florence were taken, and the Confederate army driven toward Decatur. The railroad from Tuscumbia to Decatur had been wrecked, and 60 flatboats and ferries sunk. He did acknowledge the excess of burning south of the river, and reported he ordered that to cease, shooting those who disobeyed. He concluded, "After that, nothing was burned except by my order."¹³⁰⁵

Then on May 26, 1863, Cornyn and his Angels destroyed the industrial capacity of Florence. At this time, Lauderdale County was a vital producer of wool and cotton textiles, as well as tanneries, for the war effort. Another native, Captain Riden Deford, son of a Methodist itinerant, directed the Union forces to their targets. Brushing the defending forces of S.A.M. Wood aside, tan yards and mills were burned, and the essential Globe Cotton mills destroyed. Sherman's order to Dodge, and Young's encounter with Cornyn saved most of Florence from a similar fate. Unlike

¹³⁰³ Jackson, Oscar L. [*The Colonel's Diary. Journals Kept Before and During the Civil War....*](#) No publication place, date, circa 1922, pp. 92-93; Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baston Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 61.

¹³⁰⁴ McDonough, April, ed. "The Disastrous Dispute of Two Missourians." *The Bugle Call. The Newsletter of the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation*. Addresses the murder of Florence M. Cornyn by William D. Bowen during an August 1863 court martial. Excerpted from [*The Fighting 10th: The History of the 10th Missouri Cavalry US*](#). Len Eagleburger. Author House, 2004.; Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baston Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 61.

¹³⁰⁵ [Report of Brigadier General G M Dodge dated Corinth, Mississippi](#), May 5, 1863, OR., Series I, Volume XXIII, Part 1, page 249-250.

La Grange, the Florence Wesleyan campus, although virtually moribund, was spared.¹³⁰⁶

In contrast, Athens was brutally devastated by the forces of [Colonel John Turchin](#) following the devastation of a railroad bridge, whose collapse killed a number of Union soldiers. Decatur, described by one soldier as a “shackly, dirty, little town” was similarly leveled. Like Florence, Huntsville escaped the same fate. The city was long a Union garrison, and the downtown spring and surrounding mountains won the invader’s admiration.¹³⁰⁷

Desolation, occupation and guerilla war would characterize the Tennessee Valley for the remainder of the war. In the poorer, non-slaveholding enclaves in the east and south of the Tennessee River, pro-Union sentiments remained strong. From that section of North Alabama, dissidents and draft resisters confronted the Confederate authority. After 1862, when the Union troops established a continuing presence in the region, some 3.000 white pro-Union Alabamians joined the [First Alabama Cavalry](#) regiment and other federal units.¹³⁰⁸

¹³⁰⁶ [“History of the Shoals”. From the B. R. Jennings Collection](#). Information from the *Times Daily*, Thursday, February 25, 1999. Online. Accessed February 3, 2026.

¹³⁰⁷ Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baston Rouge: University Press, 2017, pp. 54-67..

¹³⁰⁸ “Presidential Reconstruction in Alabama,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed May 24, 2026; Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baston Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 61.

Chapter 11

Denouement: End of an Era in the Tennessee Valley

The Ruin of War.

Like the rest of the South, the Tennessee Valley that emerged from war in the spring of 1865 was not merely defeated; it was shattered into pieces. The social underpinnings that had governed the region since statehood had collapsed almost simultaneously. The Confederacy was eradicated. Slavery was abolished; almost half the population was now free for the first time. The social fabric of antebellum Alabama, its foundational structure, unity, and moral order was rent asunder.

The close of the Civil War in 1865 did not so much inaugurate a new era as it exposed, with unusual clarity, the fragility of the one that had preceded it. As Rogers and Ward observed, Alabama found itself on a new frontier, challenged to redefine its social order.¹³⁰⁹ The war had passed repeatedly through North Alabama, leaving behind not merely the visible scars of occupation, requisition, and destruction, but the less tangible erosion of capital—financial, institutional, and human—upon which the region's antebellum aspirations had depended. The Valley, which in the 1830s and 1840s had briefly imagined itself a corridor of commercial and educational promise—its river an unimpeded commercial corridor, its railroads nationally linked, its colleges chartered and prominent—now found itself stripped of the very conditions that had made such aspirations plausible.¹³¹⁰

¹³⁰⁹ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [*Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994. Part Two, p.225.

¹³¹⁰ Among the useful recent studies of Alabama during Reconstruction are the following: Fitzgerald, Michael W. [*Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017; Wiggins, Sarah Woolfolk. [*The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865–1881*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977; Noe, Kenneth W., ed. [*The Yellowhammer War: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013; Bridges, Edwin C. [*Alabama: The Making of an American State*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 112-118; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [*Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994; Storey, Margaret M. [*Loyalty and*](#)

Tens of thousands of men who had marched away in gray uniforms now returned to farms stripped of livestock, fences, labor, and capital. Many returned wounded. Many did not return at all. Those who survived came home to a countryside whose future was uncertain and whose past could not be restored. Robert McFarland (1836-1892) was one such man. Born in Ireland, his aspirations brought him to America, where he studied at Washington College (now Washington and Lee). Earning a law degree months before the outbreak of war, he moved to Florence, where he opened a law practice with partner James B. Irvine. As seen, he became a captain in the Lauderdale volunteers, subsequently part of the 4th Alabama Infantry. He watched many of his volunteer charges die on the Manassas battlefield. He fought resolutely throughout the war until its end. Like so many others, he then trudged home—bereft, penniless, and homeless, his only attire his tattered CSA uniform. At one point on the return, he was ordered by a Union officer to remove the uniform. The procurement by a friend of a linen duster to don over the uniform soothed the confrontation¹³¹¹. He continued his homeward journey toward an uncertain future.

Something like 122,000 Alabamians served the Confederacy; more than 35,000 died from battle, disease, or imprisonment.¹³¹² While most of the state escaped major military action until the final few months of the war, North Alabama's losses were particularly severe because the Tennessee Valley was a shifting battleground. Both armies moved back and forth. The garrisoning, fighting, and foraging depleted resources and

Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004. For an older scholarly study of the [Dunning school](#), see: Fleming, Walter Lynwood. *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*. New York: Macmillan, 1905; Fleming, Walter Lynwood, ed. *Documents Relating to Reconstruction*. Morgantown, West Virginia: Walter Lynwood Fleming, 1905. Bromberg, Frederick George. *The Reconstruction Period in Alabama*. Mobile: Bienville Monument Fund, c. 1905, 1911, offers a view divergent from the Dunning School. (In libraries, it seems to have escaped digitization).

¹³¹¹ "Robert McFarland". [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical](#). Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888, p. 296; "Captain Robert C. McFarland." [Find a Grave](#). Online. Accessed June 9, 2026; [Robert McFarland Papers, 1867-1874](#). Finding Aid prepared by Dixie Norwood. UNA Archives and Special Collections. Online. Accessed June 9, 2026.

¹³¹² Fleming, Walter Lynwood. [Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama](#). New York: Macmillan, 1905, pp. 78-80.

energy.¹³¹³ The generation that had filled the classrooms of La Grange College and Florence Wesleyan University in the 1840s and 1850s had marched directly into catastrophe. Some, like Edward Asbury O'Neal, would return to a kind of post-war prominence. Others, like Thomas Minott Peters, emerged committed to a radically different social and political future. A look at post-war lives of a few Tennessee Valley returnees will assist in understanding the conditions and the challenges facing the state. Many became casualties of war, and the stories of a few of those have already been told.

The economic devastation was equally profound. During the war, armies from both sides endlessly traversed the valley. Railroads were damaged. Manufacturing facilities were destroyed. Livestock disappeared. Cotton production collapsed. The credit system that had financed the antebellum plantation economy evaporated almost overnight. The value represented by enslaved human property—constituting a substantial portion of Alabama's accumulated wealth—vanished with emancipation.¹³¹⁴ For white Alabamians who had invested their identities in the slaveholding order, the loss was psychological as well as economic. The region had not merely lost a labor system; it had lost a social hierarchy that many had mistaken for permanence. The paternalist assumptions that underlay much of antebellum political thought—from Richard Henderson Rivers's moral philosophy to William Lowndes Yancey's defense of Southern society—had rested upon the existence of slavery. Emancipation rendered those assumptions obsolete, even when many refused to acknowledge it.

The freed people faced a crisis no less severe. Four million African Americans emerged from slavery possessing newfound freedom but little else. In Alabama, most entered the postwar period without land, without accumulated capital, and with only limited access to education. The same legal system that had once prohibited their literacy could not instantly transform itself into a mechanism of equality. Freedom represented a

¹³¹³ Bridges, Edwin C. [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 93; William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 225.

¹³¹⁴ Bridges, Edwin C. [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 107

monumental achievement; it did not guarantee prosperity. Barriers remained cruelly in place.¹³¹⁵

The old planter class was weakened yet struggled to reassert leadership in the Reconstruction period. In many ways, they were arrayed against the group of small farmers who were impoverished by the consequences of war and often blamed the elite for their postwar plight. Change came slowly. In time, both industry and mercantilism would grow and new players would join the social setting. Crushed, Alabamians were forced to accept the political outcome, but tellingly through Reconstruction and the decades afterward, the powerful rejected the social consequences of war. Slavery was abolished, but across the classes of white society, neither the idea nor the legal assertion that freedmen were truly equal citizens was accepted.¹³¹⁶

The result was a region in which both races confronted insecurity, albeit from profoundly different starting points. White families mourned lost sons, lost fortunes, and lost status. Black families confronted the challenge of constructing lives from generations of enforced dependency. Neither task would prove easy.

The Collapse of the Educational Order.

As seen, Alabama's Tennessee Valley bore the brunt of the conflict, the middle and southern parts of the state being largely spared. From the early movements of Union General [Don Carlos Buell](#), through the occupations and counter-occupations of 1862–1864, to the destructive raids associated with forces under General [Grenville M. Dodge](#) and his subordinates, the region experienced repeated military intrusion.¹³¹⁷ The burning of La Grange in April 1863—its buildings destroyed and its library

¹³¹⁵ Foner, Eric. [A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877](#). Updated Edition. New York: First Harper Perennial Modern Classics. Edition, 2015, pp. 1-10

¹³¹⁶ William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt. [Alabama: The History of a Deep South State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994, p. 226.

¹³¹⁷ Jackson, Oscar L. [The Colonel's Diary. Journals Kept Before and During the Civil War....](#) No publication place, date, circa 1922, pp. 92-93; Fitzgerald, Michael W. *Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*. Baton Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 61; Granger, J. T. [Major-General Grenville M. Dodge. Compiled from Official Records](#). NY: Styles & Cash, 1893.

dispersed or consumed—was among the most visible symbols of this devastation, but it was by no means unique.¹³¹⁸

Even where buildings remained standing, the institutional fabric was irreparably strained. Florence itself, though spared the worst physical destruction, was subject to occupation, requisition, and economic dislocation. The protective order attributed to William Tecumseh Sherman—whether motivated by personal connection, strategic calculation, or simple contingency—may have preserved the structures of Florence Wesleyan, but it could not preserve the conditions necessary for its continued operation.¹³¹⁹

Before the war, college was still seen as an institution for the elite. Even as the number of colleges in the nation expanded with the burgeoning population and the expanding frontier, the proportion of college-going citizens did not rise much at all. Of 123 U.S. colleges in 1861, only 16 enrolled more than 200 students; 47 colleges had fewer than 100 enrollees.¹³²⁰

The educational institutions that had trained the valley's professional class were bankrupt, occupied, closed, or barely functioning. In this respect, the fate of Florence Wesleyan University and its predecessor La Grange College was not anomalous but emblematic. These institutions, conceived in the flush of antebellum optimism, were sustained by a delicate equilibrium of denominational patronage, local subscription, and the steady flow of students from a society sufficiently stable to support both. War and its aftermath dissolved that equilibrium. By 1865, the question was no longer whether such institutions could flourish, but whether they could survive at all.¹³²¹ The war exacted its toll on colleges everywhere.

As was the case nationally, the antebellum educational system of North Alabama had been designed to serve a relatively narrow segment of society. Institutions such as La Grange College and Florence Wesleyan

¹³¹⁸ Barnard, Harry V. "[LaGrange College: A Historical Sketch.](#)" *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. XII (January 1, 1988), pp. 39- 46; McDonald, William Lindsey. [The Civil War Tales of the Tennessee Valley](#). Killen, Ala.: Heart of Dixie Publishing, 2003, p. 99

¹³¹⁹ Young, Robert Anderson. [Reminiscences](#). Nashville: Publishing House, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900, p. 81.

¹³²⁰ Cohen, Michael David. [Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 6.

¹³²¹ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. "[The South's Oldest State Teacher's College.](#)" *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936),

University prepared the same ministers, lawyers, physicians, teachers, and political leaders as their counterparts. Their curricula emphasized Latin, Greek, moral philosophy, rhetoric, mathematics, and classical history. The purpose was not vocational training but the cultivation of a learned elite.¹³²² Across America, colleges served that same purpose. In the 17th century in New England, for example, 96 percent of the college alumni were either ministers, lawyers, or physicians. Indeed, suggests historian David Cohen, if one's aspirations were not directed toward those three professions, there was no need to enroll.¹³²³

Everywhere in Southern higher education, the war's toll was cumulative. Faculty dispersed, students enlisted or were conscripted, and the local economy—upon which tuition payments and subscriptions depended—collapsed under the combined weight of military exactions and the destruction of the slave-based labor system. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Valley's educational institutions faced not merely a temporary interruption but a structural crisis. The Civil War undermined each of these supports in turn. The destruction of slavery as a labor system—formalized through the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution—was accompanied by the collapse of the plantation economy that had underwritten much of the region's educational ambitions.¹³²⁴

While the old La Grange Military Academy had been burned in 1863, Florence Wesleyan University survived physically but failed financially. Enrollment collapsed. Endowments disappeared. Students exchanged classrooms for military service. Faculty scattered. If the financial collapse was severe, the demographic impact of the war was equally consequential.

¹³²²Cohen, Michael David. [*Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 11; Flynt, J. Wayne. "[Southern Higher Education and the Civil War](#)." *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), pp. 211-225. Clark, Willis G. [*History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889*](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889.

¹³²³ Cohen, Michael David. [*Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012.. p. 3

¹³²⁴ Flynt, J. Wayne. "[Southern Higher Education and the Civil War](#)." *Civil War History*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968), pp. 211-225; Griffin, Richard W. "Higher Education in the Tennessee Valley of Alabama, 1830 – 1899." *Bulletin of the North Alabama Historical Association*. n. d. reprinted in "Tennessee Valley History," *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*, Vol. XII (January 1, 1988), pp. 54-66.

The Tennessee Valley, like much of the Confederacy, had contributed heavily to the Confederate war effort. Casualties, both fatal and disabling, were significant. The cohort of young men who would have constituted the student body of institutions like Florence Wesleyan was, by 1865, diminished in number and altered in circumstance.¹³²⁵

The result was a dramatic contraction in the pool of qualified and paying students. Colleges such as Florence Wesleyan found themselves in the paradoxical position of possessing physical plant and chartered authority but lacking the human and financial capital necessary to sustain operations. The intellectual culture that had flourished along the Tennessee River before 1861 entered a prolonged period of struggle, as it did in all of Alabama and the devastated South.¹³²⁶ The difficulties facing Florence Wesleyan after Appomattox reflected broader regional realities. Parents who struggled to feed their families could not afford tuition. Churches that once subsidized higher education were impoverished. The question confronting educators was no longer how to refine the leadership class of an expanding feudal society. It was how to rebuild a broken one.

Indeed, across America, the Civil War and Reconstruction would fundamentally alter the purpose and focus of higher education in the nation. The role of the federal government expanded. Congress passed laws funding certain types of colleges and began to collect information on education in the states.¹³²⁷

The war and Reconstruction would transform Southern education. Communities that had previously supported classical academies, as they began to regain their equilibrium, demanded practical instruction. Throughout the South, educational reformers began moving away from exclusively classical models toward curricula emphasizing teacher training, agriculture, engineering, commerce, and practical sciences. This shift did not occur because educators suddenly abandoned the humanities. Rather, economic necessity forced institutions to address the needs [of a population](#)

¹³²⁵ Cohen, Michael David. [Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 97, p. 13; Stetar Joseph M., [“In Search of a Direction: Southern Higher Education after the Civil War.”](#) *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 341-367.

¹³²⁶ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889.

¹³²⁷ Cohen, Michael David. [Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 16.

[confronting unprecedented social change](#).¹³²⁸ That transition was clearly evident in the Tennessee Valley. The antebellum college had been a symbol of aspiration and gentility. The postwar normal school into which Florence Wesleyan transformed would become an instrument of rebuilding and survival.¹³²⁹

Reconstruction Policy and the Reorientation of Education

The ten years of Reconstruction can be separated into three phases. [Presidential Reconstruction](#) (1865-1867) under the aegis of President Andrew Johnson, [Congressional Reconstruction](#) (1867 – 1874), and the subsequent [Redeemer period](#), when the federal government largely abandoned its efforts to protect freedmen. Whites regained power, and Reconstruction effectively came to an end.¹³³⁰

The Reconstruction era, inaugurated under the auspices of federal authority and shaped by a series of legislative measures including the Reconstruction Acts, brought with it a reconfiguration of public institutions in Alabama and all the South. While much of the historiography has focused on political and racial transformations, the period also witnessed significant developments in education.

In Alabama, as elsewhere, Reconstruction governments—supported in part by federal initiatives such as the Freedmen's Bureau—sought to expand access to education, particularly at the primary and secondary levels.¹³³¹ The creation of public school systems, though uneven and contested, marked a departure from the largely private and denominational model of the antebellum period. The educational challenge confronting Alabama after the war was staggering.

Large portions of the white population had received only limited schooling before the conflict. Access to academies and denominational

¹³²⁸ Cohen, Michael David. [Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 97.

¹³²⁹ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. “[The South’s Oldest State Teacher’s College](#).” *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), pp. 282-288

¹³³⁰ Bridges, Edwin C. [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 112; Foner, Eric. [A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877](#). Updated Edition. New York: First Harper Perennial Modern Classics. Edition, p. 82.

¹³³¹ Foner, Eric. [A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877](#). Updated Edition. New York: First Harper Perennial Modern Classics. Edition, p. 92; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part Fourth. Public and Normal Schools, pp. 217-262.

schools, or the schoolrooms of itinerant teachers was restricted to those with fiscal wherewithal and physical proximity. Wartime disruption worsened the problem. Among freed people the situation was even more severe. Generations of legal restrictions had deliberately suppressed literacy among enslaved populations. The result was a society in which substantial numbers of white and Black citizens lacked both qualifications for and access to even elementary education.¹³³² The freedmen embraced the opportunities now available and long denied. The Freedmen's Bureau built some schools, and Black communities built other ones. Prominent schools such as [Talladega College](#) and [Lincoln Normal](#) in Marion were supported by religious groups from the north.¹³³³

The old collegiate model could not address the press for growth and change. The need was not merely for scholars but for teachers. Not merely for ministers but for instructors capable of establishing common schools across rural counties. The educational frontier of Reconstruction was therefore different from that of the antebellum era. The challenge was no longer elite cultivation but mass instruction.¹³³⁴

The Withering of Florence Wesleyan.

The institution with which Florence Wesleyan shared a common heritage, La Grange Military Academy, was burned to the ground by Union cavalry in April 1863 and was never reborn. Florence was not untouched during its various occupations, but it fared better than Tuscaloosa, La Grange, or Athens. The college survived, remaining open in some measure throughout the war, with but two faculty, Young and Rice, and perhaps a few young preparatory students there at war's end. After the war, the Methodist Tennessee Conference met October 4-11, 1865, and the minutes of that meeting identified Young as still the active president of the

¹³³² Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part Fourth. Public and Normal Schools, pp. 217-262.

¹³³³ Bridges, Edwin C. [Alabama: The Making of an American State](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016, p. 115.

¹³³⁴ Weeks, Stephen B.. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913, pp. 84-111; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889. Part Fourth. Public and Normal Schools, pp. 217-262.

university.¹³³⁵ Almost immediately thereafter he assumed the position of Secretary of the emergent Vanderbilt University, the resulting vacancy not being soon filled. For an all-but-dormant Florence Wesleyan, Septimus Rice filled the roles of caretaker and overseer. He may have taught, with an awareness of the caution mentioned earlier of endowment forfeiture if the college closed altogether, a class or two to townspeople and returning soldiers.

In the *Florence Journal*, a notice signed by Board chair George Washington Foster, Rice informed the citizenry of the “reopening” of the college on a limited basis September 11, 1868.¹³³⁶ For the first five-month session, tuition was declared to range from \$20 to \$30. Courses would be available through junior-year instruction. The antebellum curriculum was still intact, with instruction, according to newspapers, in ancient languages, natural philosophy, pure and mixed mathematics, and the natural sciences. Instruction in modern languages and civil engineering was also offered, among others. As if to stress continuity, Foster’s notice further mentioned that Septimus Rice had been in charge for some time. The grounds of FWU were often used for public events and as a church school, also for religious events. For example, on Friday June 6, 1866, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches sponsored a picnic to celebrate the 35th anniversary of William Basil Wood’s first Sunday School at the Methodist Church. (Even at that late date Sunday Schools were opposed by a wide segment of the Southern evangelical Protestants).¹³³⁷

But announced plans of fully reopening the university engendered denominational opposition. At the 1868 Tennessee Methodist Conference, there were vociferous assertions that Florence Wesleyan had failed, with numerous delegates pledging to withhold further support. There were efforts within the conference to elicit interest in founding a new school in

¹³³⁵ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 48.

¹³³⁶ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 49.

¹³³⁷ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 48- 49. There is further evidence that an instructor associated with Florence Wesleyan, W. E. Wills, also taught classes between 1871 and 1873.

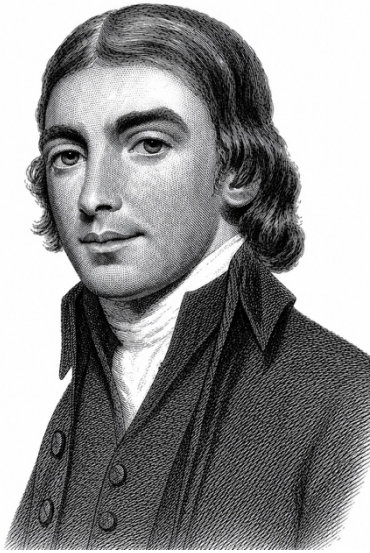
Bowling Green, Kentucky. In fact, the Methodist Church was likely already reassessing its post-war role sustaining smaller, regional colleges. The church recognized there were few students ready to return to school, and less money to pay tuition. Further, the elite planter class that had often underwritten the fiscal deficits of denominational schools was all but bankrupt. Abolition had stripped them of their chattel assets; their savings and investments in Confederate assets were eliminated. Consecutive post-war crop failures and the absence of free-market labor to work the land added to planter woes. Neither the common people in Methodist congregations nor their former plantation elite had the resources to sustain the antebellum denominational investment in small regional schools.¹³³⁸ By the time of the meeting of the Tennessee Conference, two sponsoring divisions of the Southern Methodist Church had withdrawn support of Florence Wesleyan – the Alabama and Memphis conferences.¹³³⁹

William Basil Wood, a La Grange graduate and influential Florentine, mounted a strong defense of the University at the conference. His defense, carried in a January (1869) issue of *The Nashville Christian Advocate* cited the strong curriculum already in place and he managed to win over numbers of delegates. The school fully reopened its doors in the Fall of 1869. A five member committee charged by the Tennessee Conference with assessing the university's future was established, and its visitation was completed in December 1869. Its recommendations found a way to recommend continuing to move Florence Wesleyan forward.¹³⁴⁰

¹³³⁸ Fleming, Walter Lynwood. [*Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*](#). New York: Macmillan, 1905, pp. 251-277; McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 52.

¹³³⁹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 52.

¹³⁴⁰ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University*](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 50. The members of the visiting committee were Dr. G. W. Wilson, President of the Huntsville Female Academy, Reverend J. W. Whitten, senior elder of the Florence district, Dr. J. J. Dement, member of the board of trustees of Nashville's Central University, and Revs. Richard P. Ranson and F. A. Ross.



42 William Henry Anderson

As a result, FWU was approved to reopen by the Tennessee Conference as a permanent, full-fledged University in January 1869. From the presidency of [St. Charles College](#) in Missouri arrived [Dr. William Henry Anderson](#) (1817 -1893?). He assumed the role of President of the school about that time, though his appointment was not approved by the Tennessee Conference until the 1870 annual Tennessee Conference meeting in Pulaski.¹³⁴¹ The newly created North [Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#) was soon added as an additional sponsor of the college. The *Florence Journal* announced a strong faculty that would be on hand, with professorships in Natural Science and the Preparatory School soon to be filled.

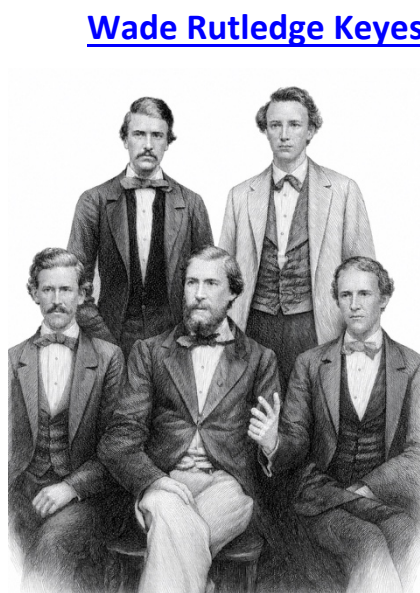
At the Annual Conference in Pulaski, the Committee on Education reported repaired buildings and a competent faculty in place to serve students.¹³⁴²

The Law Department Gambit In his brief stint as the seventh President of what had once been the Tennessee Conference's La Grange College, Anderson strove mightily to sustain Florence Wesleyan as a viable university. One of his boldest efforts was the institution of a law

¹³⁴¹ Gilbert, H. C. "[H. C. Gilbert Address to the Florence Rotary Club, 12 September, 1921](#)". Rootsweb. Ancestry.com. Accessed December 8, 2025; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 11. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research. The biography of W. H. Anderson and how he was recruited to Florence Wesleyan remains the object of informed conjecture. It appears he held a D.D. (honorary), conferred by [Southern University](#) in 1866. Before coming to Florence Wesleyan, he was pastor of the prestigious [Chestnut Street](#) Church in Louisville and served as President of the St. Charles Missouri College. After his tenure at Wesleyan terminated it appears Anderson served as President of [Kentucky Wesleyan University](#), a logical step within the Methodist hierarchy. There he also taught Moral Philosophy and Greek. His history overlaps with the [William H. Anderson](#) that served as President of the American Medical Association in Alabama in 1881. The biography La Grange's 7th President warrants further research.

¹³⁴² "[Dr. William Henry Anderson](#)." ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archives and Research. University of North Alabama. Online. Accessed June 15, 2026; McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 50. Graphic of President Anderson from the ROAR site

department under the aegis of two prominent graduates of La Grange, William Basil Wood and Wade Keyes. That Anderson would announce their appointments provides an insight into postwar Reconstruction period in Alabama. During the initial years of Presidential Reconstruction, Andrew Johnson permitted the white men of the South, upon oath of allegiance to the U. S. Constitution, to have their rights of citizenship restored. The laws of Alabama, excepting those addressing slavery, remained in place, and local officials continued in office. The roles of these two, Wood and Keyes, also provide insight into the standing and responsibilities of La Grange and Florence Wesleyan graduates in the Reconstruction years. Their stories and those of a few others will serve as exemplars for the purpose of this study.



104 Wade Keyes (center)

[Wade Rutledge Keyes](#) (1821-1879) was a prominent Confederate official and one of the most prominent attorneys in Alabama. Born in 1821, the son of General George and Nelly Rutledge Keyes, he was classically educated at La Grange and the University of Virginia, with further study in Europe in 1844. After a stint in Tallahassee, he moved to Montgomery and in 1853 was elected Chancellor of the Southern division of the [Court of Chancery](#) in Alabama, a post he held through 1859. While in Florida, he had written two important legal treatises.¹³⁴³ As Chancellor, he contributed another: [An Essay on the Learning of Partial and of Future Interests of Chattels Personal](#).¹³⁴⁴ His work on chattel property is not a general defense of slavery in the style of [George Fitzhugh](#) nor a moral philosophy justification like Richard Henderson Rivers. It is more chilling because it is technical, treating slavery as ordinary legal architecture. “Chattels personal” describes movable personal property as opposed to real property. His writing expressly included enslaved persons

¹³⁴³ Brewer, Willis. [Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872](#). Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872, pp. 304–305. Keyes’ other legal titles were *An Essay on the Learning of Remainders* (1852), and *An Essay on the Learning of Future Interests in Real Property* (1853)

¹³⁴⁴ Keyes, Wade. [An Essay on the Learning of Partial and of Future Interests of Chattels Personal](#). Montgomery: J. H. and T. F. Martin, 1853.

within the chattel category – along with cattle, furniture, books, and money.¹³⁴⁵ With a worldview informed by his privileged planter background and his training at La Grange and the University of Virginia, Keyes did not merely assert slaves could be bought and sold. He placed slaves inside common-law machinery where property could be divided across time: life interests, future interests, conditional limitations, trust arrangements, gifts by will, marriage settlements and family divisions of wealth. That is where Keyes' book becomes more than doctrinal abstraction. It shows how the slave system required high technical law. Human beings were not only "owned"; they were made to carry future wealth across generations. Their labor, reproductive capacity, family separation, hire value, and descent through estates were all absorbed into the grammar of property.

In antebellum Montgomery, Keyes played a key role in the birth of the first law school certified to grant degrees in Alabama. The trustees of the University of Alabama had attempted in 1846 to establish a two-year degree plan in Tuscaloosa, but that initial effort failed.¹³⁴⁶ The second effort mimicked the time-honored university practice of absorbing a private legal training entity and fitting it to the University's structure.¹³⁴⁷ While Chancellor, Keyes had begun teaching classes on property law in Montgomery. Out of those lectures emerged the private Montgomery Law School. In its act of incorporation as part of the University of Alabama, the Justices of the Alabama Supreme Court were designated its *ex officio* trustees, and Wade Keyes was its only faculty member. The law school students had full access to the state and Supreme Court libraries, and rooms in the Capitol were made available for use by the school. Diplomas were conferred, based not only upon the completion of academic

¹³⁴⁵ From an annotation describing a copy of the book for sale on [Lawbook Exchange](#). Online. Accessed June 18, 2026.

¹³⁴⁶ "[Early Foundations and Formative Years](#)." Alabama Law. The University of Alabama. Online. Accessed June 21, 2026; Sellers, James Benson. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1953, pp. 160-161.

¹³⁴⁷ "An Act: To Incorporate the Montgomery Law School, and to make it the Law Department of the University of the State," No. 252, January 25, 1860, in David I. Durham. "Introduction to Wade Keyes and the Montgomery Law School," pp. 1-14. In Durham, David I., Pruitte, Paul M. Jr., Keyes, Wade. [Occasional Papers of the Bounds Law Library, Number Two: Wade Keyes' Introductory Lecture to the Montgomery Law School: Legal Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Alabama](#). *Occasional Publications of the Bounds Law Library 2* (2001). Accessed June 21, 2026, pp. 12-13.

requirements but on evaluation of their performance and qualifications. Yet, despite its sound support, infrastructure, and leadership, the school could not survive the Civil War, ceasing operations in February 1861. Not until 1872 was a new effort inaugurated in Tuscaloosa.¹³⁴⁸

Wade Keyes was an ardent proponent of states' rights and secession, along with his two younger brothers, George Presley Keyes and John Washington Keyes. While his brothers served the Confederacy in military roles, with John ultimately taking on the role of surgeon with the 17th Alabama infantry, Wade would serve within the Department of Justice, primarily as an Assistant Attorney General, with separate stints as Acting Attorney General and Attorney General *ad interim*.¹³⁴⁹

At war's end, he returned to Florence, where he resumed the practice of law.¹³⁵⁰ There, he joined William Basil Wood in Anderson's effort to save Florence Wesleyan University.¹³⁵¹

William Basil Wood (1820-1891) may be the most enduring name associated with the history of La Grange College. His post-war reminiscences in the Florence Gazette remain one of the most important chronicles of that period.¹³⁵² His prominence has been previously documented, including his attendance at La Grange College, admission to the bar in 1843, membership on the Florence Wesleyan board of trustees from the inception, and persistent advocate within the Methodist

¹³⁴⁸ David I. Durham. "Introduction to Wade Keyes and the Montgomery Law School," pp. 1-14. In Durham, David I., Pruitte, Paul M. Jr., Keyes, Wade. [Occasional Papers of the Bounds Law Library, Number Two: Wade Keyes' Introductory Lecture to the Montgomery Law School: Legal Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Alabama](#). *Occasional Publications of the Bounds Law Library* 2 (2001). Accessed June 21, 2026.

¹³⁴⁹ David I. Durham. "Introduction to Wade Keyes and the Montgomery Law School," pp. 1-14. In Durham, David I., Pruitte, Paul M. Jr., Keyes, Wade. [Occasional Papers of the Bounds Law Library, Number Two: Wade Keyes' Introductory Lecture to the Montgomery Law School: Legal Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Alabama](#). *Occasional Publications of the Bounds Law Library* 2 (2001). Accessed June 21, 2026, p. 6..

¹³⁵⁰ Owen, Thomas McAdory and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company. Vol. 3, 1921, p. 974

¹³⁵¹ "[Lauderdale County, Alabama. Advertisements and Classified Ads](#)," *Alabama Genealogy Trails*. Online. Accessed June 22, 2026. In addition to Wade Keyes, advertisements in the *Florence Times-Journal* list Neander Rice, Edward Asbury O'Neal and his son, William Basil Wood, and Robert McFarland among the attorney practicing there at that date.

¹³⁵² Wood, William Basil. "[Historical Address of Hon. Wm. B. Wood, July 4, 1876](#)". As published in the *Florence Gazette* July to September 1876. Accessed December 14, 2010

Conference for the struggling Florence Wesleyan College.¹³⁵³ Wood belonged to the older Whig-Methodist improvement generation that had helped make Florence both a legal and educational center before the Civil War. Educated at La Grange College, subsequently reading law under Judge Daniel Coleman, he was admitted to the bar at Florence in 1843. Within a year he had been elected judge of the Lauderdale County Court. By 1849 he was a Whig candidate for Congress, and in 1860 he was a Bell elector at large—an affiliation that placed him among Alabama’s conservative Union or Union-leaning constitutionalists before secession, though not among those who refused the Confederacy once the break came.¹³⁵⁴

After the war, during the Presidential reconstruction years, he was re-elected as judge of the 4th Circuit Court for northern Alabama, bringing additional standing to Anderson’s initiative. His postwar judgeship was more precarious than the admiring local biographies sometimes imply. Governor Lewis E. Parsons did not reappoint him in 1865, but in June 1866, during Presidential Reconstruction, Wood was again elected judge of the Fourth Judicial Circuit, defeating [Sidney C. Posey](#) and R. O. Pickett. That restored him to office in a moment when former Confederates were regaining much of Alabama’s local machinery under Andrew Johnson’s reconstruction policy. Yet the restoration was unstable. The Fourth Circuit then included or soon came to include counties in the Tennessee Valley and adjacent hill country where wartime Unionism remained powerful and local hostilities were not settled by Appomattox. In that terrain, a former Confederate colonel on the bench was not merely a judge; he was also an unwelcome symbol of the attempted restoration of the old local order.¹³⁵⁵

Wood could not safely or effectively transact judicial business in the Unionist portion of his district, especially south of the Tennessee

¹³⁵³ Linda Larson Aretta. “[William Basil Wood.](#)” *Family Search*. Online. Accessed January 14, 2026

¹³⁵⁴ Brewer, Willis. [Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men From 1540 to 1872.](#) Montgomery AL: Barrett & Brown, 1872, p. 546; Garrett, William G. [Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama, for Thirty Years, With an Appendix.](#) Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company Press, 1872; p. 391

¹³⁵⁵ Garrett, William G. [Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama, for Thirty Years, With an Appendix.](#) Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company Press, 1872; p. 391; Fitzgerald, Michael W. [Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South.](#) Baton Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 118; [Northern Alabama: Historical and Biographical.](#) Illustrated. Birmingham: A. Davis Smith & T. A. Deland, 1888. Kindle download. Hathi Trust. In public domain. Link above to Internet Archive. Copy in Apple Books, p. 311

River, a circumstance reflecting the nature of north Alabama Reconstruction. Michael W. Fitzgerald describes the region as one in which returning Confederates and wartime Unionists used local courts, political organization, and sometimes violence to punish enemies or expel unwelcome neighbors. A [surviving Wood letter to Governor R. M. Patton](#) also reports that Judge Wood had received threats connected with Winston County.¹³⁵⁶ Indeed, his judgeship seems not to have extended into the period of Congressional Reconstruction when the Unionists were most influential.

That interruption may help explain his availability for Florence Wesleyan University's last efforts at survival. Wood was not merely a local lawyer who happened to be nearby. He had long been a principal lay patron of the institution: one nineteenth-century account credits him with originating the idea of Florence Wesleyan University, raising subscriptions for it, serving for years as president of its board of trustees, giving liberally to it, and later helping arrange its transfer to the State of Alabama after its endowment had been exhausted by the war. His investment in the school was therefore institutional, denominational, civic, and personal.

For Anderson and his law initiative, Wood supplied Florence standing, trustee authority, Methodist connection, and the prestige of a former circuit judge. Keyes supplied a rarer credential: actual experience in organized legal education. Before the war, his Montgomery law lectures had become the Montgomery Law School, and in 1860 that school was designated the Law Department of the University of Alabama. The proposed law department can thus be read as a last attempt to convert the town's dense legal culture—Wood, Keyes, Neander Rice, the O'Neals, Robert McFarland, and others—into an institutional asset.

But the timing was bad. Florence Wesleyan was trying to improvise a professional school in a devastated regional economy, after the collapse of its antebellum endowment, amid denominational retrenchment, and just

¹³⁵⁶ Fitzgerald, Michael W. [Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South](#). Baton Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 118; W. B. Wood to R. M. Patton, Florence, Alabama, November 1866, "[Letter from Judge W. B. Wood in Florence, Alabama, to Governor R. M. Patton](#)," *Civil War and Reconstruction Governors of Alabama*, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Digital Archives, item 51974. The ADAH item description states that Wood reported receiving threats from a group calling itself the "Loyal Citizens" concerning the opening of circuit court in Winston County, Alabama. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026.

as higher education in Alabama was being reorganized around state institutions. The University of Alabama itself, burned in 1865 and reopened only in 1871–72 with a tiny student body, permanently reestablished its law department in February 1872. Even if the revived Tuscaloosa law school began with only a handful of students, it carried the authority of the state university and the continuity of the earlier Montgomery law department that Keyes himself had helped found. That revival would have made a rival law department at a failing Methodist college in Florence still harder to sustain.¹³⁵⁷

In that sense, the law department proposal was less a plausible rescue plan than the last flicker of an older Florence strategy. Before the war, La Grange and Florence Wesleyan had imagined that denominational learning, local leadership, legal culture, and civic improvement could reinforce one another. After the war, those same ingredients remained present in persons such as Wood and Keyes, but the institutional world had shifted beneath them. Florence Wesleyan could no longer command the resources, students, or denominational loyalty necessary to compete. Wood's final educational achievement was therefore not the creation of a law school. His accomplishment was the preservation of the campus through surrender: the transfer of Florence Wesleyan to the State of Alabama—a gambit that took a couple of different paths before emerging as reality.¹³⁵⁸

The commencement in June 1871 would be the university's last. Shortly afterwards, an erstwhile donor to the school, planter and former trustee [William Dickson](#), doubtlessly in need of assets, demanded of the school and of the North Alabama Methodist Conference, the return of his \$10,000 endowment contributed during Rivers' presidency. Again, a committee of five was established to assess his charges, appraise the fiscal condition of the college, and make a final report to the Conference. William Basil Wood was again on the committee, and during three days of hard work, the committee split into two factions. While both found the Methodist Church should continue to support the school, they could not agree on the means. A majority and a minority report were delivered on

¹³⁵⁷ Sellers, James Benson. [History of the University of Alabama](#). Vol. 1, 1818-1902. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1953, p. 388.

¹³⁵⁸ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research. Kindle Books download.

November 20. The minority report was signed by William Basil Wood. The majority report found that Dickson's charges that the University had not remained in full operation to be correct, but it also pointed out that it had never closed. The report found that major changes were needed to ensure the fiscal success of the University, called for appeals for additional endowments and for Dickson and others to seek a return of only half of the funds initially endowed. The minority report insisted the donors were not entitled to the return of their endowments. William McDonald recounted the complexity of their efforts to sustain the school which would have resulted in a small cash balance of about \$11,000 after all obligations had been satisfied.¹³⁵⁹

But the most important new direction shared by Wood and the signers of the minority report, was to approach the Alabama Board of Education to establish a projected agricultural program at Florence Wesleyan University and to ensure that a realigned university would resume full operation in January 1872.¹³⁶⁰

The Land-Grant Initiative. Whereas the doomed Florence Wesleyan had prepared the sons of a professional class, Alabama, like the rest of the nation, looked beyond the classical universities that had been the training ground for the elite. A war-torn nation now sought to prepare teachers for a democratic system of public education. Its purpose reflected the demands of a postwar society increasingly committed—however imperfectly and unevenly—to broader educational access. The transition was neither immediate nor complete. Classical studies survived. Denominational colleges endured. Yet the center of gravity had shifted. The

¹³⁵⁹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.*](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 59.

¹³⁶⁰ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026. Importantly discusses the competition for Morrill Land-Grant funds between Auburn, Tuscaloosa and Florence; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [*History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama.*](#) Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research; McDonald, William Lindsey. [*Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University.*](#) Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 59.

old educational order had been designed for a hierarchical society. The new one, however imperfectly realized, aimed to educate a wider public.¹³⁶¹

The common-school movement supplied one part of this transformation. In New England and then more unevenly across the North and Midwest, reformers such as Horace Mann argued that public education was not charity but civic infrastructure: a republic formed citizens, softened class conflict, encouraged moral discipline, and prepared children for economic life. Mann's ideal was free, tax-supported, nonsectarian schooling, open to all children, though in practice that ideal was compromised by race, class, gender, and region. Still, the argument mattered. Education was becoming a public obligation, not merely a private purchase.¹³⁶² During Reconstruction, the public-school notion that flickered to life in Alabama in antebellum times was reborn.

The Morrill Act of 1862 supplied a second, more dramatic part. Passed during the Civil War, it provided federal land grants to support colleges teaching agriculture and the mechanic arts, without excluding classical studies. Its purpose was not to abolish liberal education but to broaden it—to make higher learning serve farmers, mechanics, engineers, teachers, and the productive economy. The act helped create a national system of public higher education more closely tied to science, agriculture, industry, and state development.¹³⁶³

¹³⁶¹ Cohen, Michael David. [*Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012

¹³⁶² Warder, Graham. "[Horace Mann and the Creation of the Common School](#)". Virginia Commonwealth University. VCU Libraries. Social Welfare History Project. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026. Knight, Edgard W. "[The Evolving and Expanding Common School](#)." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol 25, No. 1 (September 1949), pp. 92-100; Monroe, Paul. *Founding of the American Public School System; A History of Education in the United States from the early settlements to the close of the Civil War*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940.

¹³⁶³ "[Morrill Act \(1862\)](#)". Milestone Documents. National Archives. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026; "[The Birth of Land-Grant Institutions](#)." Extension. Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026; Ross, Earle D. *Democracy's College: The Land-Grant Movement in the Formative Stage*. Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1942; Nevin, Allan. *The State Universities and Democracy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962; Wade, Kathryn Lindsay Anderson. [*The Intent and Fulfillment of the Morrill Act of 1862: A Review of the History of Auburn University and the University of Georgia*](#). M. A. Thesis. Auburn: Auburn University December 16, 2005; Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction](#)." *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026. Importantly discusses the competition for Morrill Land-Grant funds between Auburn,

Before Florence Wesleyan entered its final transformation into a state normal school, its friends made one more, and nearly successful, effort to preserve the institution under another form of public policy. In the winter of 1871–72, Florence did not merely await rescue by the State of Alabama; it competed vigorously to become Alabama’s beneficiary of the Morrill land-grant endowment. Had that effort succeeded, Wesleyan Hall might have become the seat of the state’s agricultural and mechanical college rather than the home of Alabama’s first state normal school. That it failed was not because Florence lacked an argument. It failed because the politics of Reconstruction Alabama, the fiscal desperation of several rival colleges, the unsettled question of race, and the old geographical rivalry between north Alabama and the rest of the state all converged in a single legislative contest.

Beyond public schools and land grant colleges, normal schools formed a third part of the transformation. If common schools were to exist, teachers had to be trained. The older academy or college could supply occasional teachers, but not a teaching profession. The normal school was designed to produce disciplined, methodical, professionally prepared instructors for public classrooms. In the United States, the first public normal school was founded in Massachusetts in 1839, and by the 1870s the state normal school had become the dominant institutional form for teacher preparation.¹³⁶⁴

For Alabama, those national currents arrived through the catastrophic consequences of a lost war and occupation. At the same time, Reconstruction made education, in an altered form, newly urgent. Freed people, previously mired in illiteracy by state policy and typically possessing only the most basic of menial skills, demanded schooling as one of the first fruits of freedom. Republican governments, missionary agencies, Union League pressures, and Black communities pressed for

Tuscaloosa and Florence; Rogers, William Warren, Jr. “The Founding of Alabama’s Land-Grant College at Auburn.” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 40 (January 1987), pp. 14-37; Key, Scott. “Economics or Education: The Establishment of American Land-Grant Universities”. *Journal of Higher Education* 67 (March-April 1996): 196-220.

¹³⁶⁴ Paterson, Wendy A. “[From 1871 to 2021: A Short History of Education in the United States.](#)” December 8, 2021. Buffalo State University. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026. Ogren, Christine A. [The American State Normal School. “An Instrument of Great Good.”](#) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Wright, Frank W/ “The Evolution of Normal Schools.” *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (January 1930), pp. 363-271.

educational access, even amid continuing fierce resistance from the white populations, scanty funding, and, in the end, Redeemer retrenchment.¹³⁶⁵

The Morrill Act, as it became known, was signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in July 1862. The act represented one of the most important educational departures of the Civil War Congress. Its “leading object” was to support at least one college in each participating state where, “without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics,” instruction would be directed to “such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts,” in order to promote “the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.” The act thus stood at the intersection of democratic aspiration and economic policy. It did not repudiate the classical college; it displaced its monopoly. It assumed that a republic needed not only ministers, lawyers, physicians, and planters’ sons versed in Latin, but also farmers, mechanics, engineers, and practical men trained to repair the material foundations of national life. Initially excluded from its provisions, the Confederate states were later brought within the act by subsequent measures that removed the restriction and extended the time for reply.¹³⁶⁶ In 1867, Governor Robert M. Patton was able to secure the benefits accruing from 240,000 acres of federal land to create a land-grant college in Alabama. As the concept moved toward implementation over the next few years, the restrictions in the law dictated possible selection sites. The act specified that no federal funds were to be expended for building construction, a stricture that would prove pivotal in site selection. By 1871, Governor Robert B. Lindsay accelerated the initiative; but the state had to move quickly before the federal deadline expired. Three schools with existing resources emerged as the primary competitors: The University of Alabama, East Alabama Male College and Florence Wesleyan.¹³⁶⁷

¹³⁶⁵ [“Public Education During the Civil War and Reconstruction Era.”](#) *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026; Fitzgerald, Michael W. [The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction](#). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

¹³⁶⁶ [Morrill Act \(1862\)](#). Milestone Documents. National Archives. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026;

¹³⁶⁷ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. [“The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.”](#) *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026; Rogers, William Warren, Jr. “The Founding of Alabama’s Land-Grant College at Auburn,” *Alabama Review*, Vol.69 No 1 (January 2016), pp. 54-77; Wade, Kathryn Lindsay Anderson. [The Intent and](#)

The problem was not merely how to obtain the federal grant, but where to seat the institution. By late 1871 the contest had drawn an even more crowded field: Tuscaloosa, Auburn, Florence, Talladega, Birmingham/Elyton all appeared in the legislative struggle. Tuscaloosa's claim rested on the University of Alabama, already the state's chief public institution and, in the eyes of its supporters, the natural place to append the new agricultural and mechanical department. Auburn's claim rested on East Alabama Male College, another Methodist institution that had survived the war but not prosperity. Florence's claim rested on Florence Wesleyan University, itself an older Methodist college whose antebellum promise had been shattered by war, poverty, denominational withdrawal, and the exhaustion of the private-college model. Cox and Steward identify the legislative patrons with useful precision: [Newton Nash Clements](#) and [Daniel H. Bingham](#) promoted Tuscaloosa; [Sheldon Lyne Toomer](#) and [John Louis Pennington](#) advanced Auburn; [Benjamin F. Taylor](#) of Lauderdale County introduced Florence's bill; and [J. J. Hinds](#) of Morgan County nominated Florence and the Tennessee Valley in the Senate.¹³⁶⁸

Initially, Florence's bid appeared substantial. Its trustees had offered the property to the state; former governor, Florentine, and Unionist [Robert Miller Patton](#) and other supporters traveled to Montgomery to press the case; and they represented the Florence property as worth \$50,000. Rogers emphasizes that Florence's friends were "articulate and determined," and that the institution's supporters could plausibly present the school as a ready-made public college for north Alabama.¹³⁶⁹ This was no fanciful local hope. By early February 1872, the committee charged with selecting a site was prepared to recommend Florence. Indeed, Florence Wesleyan stood, at least for a moment, on the threshold of becoming Alabama's Morrill institution.¹³⁷⁰

Yet the very strength of the Florence bid revealed the fragility of its situation. Tuscaloosa insisted that the new college ought to be joined to the

[Fulfillment of the Morrill Act of 1862: A Review of the History of Auburn University and the University of Georgia.](#) M. A. Thesis. Auburn: Auburn University December 16, 2005, 00. 62-63.

¹³⁶⁸ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026; "Land-Grant Colleges in Alabama." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed July 2, 2026.

¹³⁶⁹ Rogers, William Warren, Jr. "The Founding of Alabama's Land-Grant College at Auburn.," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 69 No 1 (January 2016), p. 61.

¹³⁷⁰ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026.

University of Alabama. Its advocates could appeal to institutional continuity, state prestige, and the practical advantage of an existing campus. Indeed, the state Board of Education had earlier urged that the grant be placed at its disposal, in part because the University already possessed buildings and the Morrill fund could not lawfully construct them.¹³⁷¹ But Tuscaloosa's aggressiveness also provoked resentment. Cox and Steward note that at one point the University of Alabama assembled its cadets in Montgomery to impress legislators, a display that drew charges of improper lobbying.¹³⁷² The land-grant fight thus became more than an educational debate; it reopened the old sectional wound inside Alabama itself. Rogers makes this explicit: the quarrel rekindled the long rivalry between north and south Alabama, with the Tennessee Valley objecting to the concentration of state benefits elsewhere.¹³⁷³

Auburn's victory grew out of weakness carefully converted into legislative advantage. East Alabama Male College had closed during the war, reopened thereafter, and by 1871 was in desperate financial condition. Its faculty and trustees recognized that the school could not continue in its existing form. The trustees therefore offered the institution to the state. More important still, the Methodist Conference meeting in Mobile in December 1871 authorized the college delegation to offer the grounds and buildings, and citizens of Auburn supplemented the bid with additional land.¹³⁷⁴ Rogers describes Auburn's bid as "desperate," but desperation could be useful when it produced a clean conveyance.¹³⁷⁵ Florence could promise value; Auburn could promise title, property, acreage, and a Methodist relinquishment that legislators came to regard as legally safer.

¹³⁷¹ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026

¹³⁷² Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026

¹³⁷³ Rogers, William Warren, Jr. "The Founding of Alabama's Land-Grant College at Auburn.," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 69 No 1 (January 2016), pp. 62-63

¹³⁷⁴ Wade, Kathryn Lindsay Anderson. [The Intent and Fulfillment of the Morrill Act of 1862: A Review of the History of Auburn University and the University of Georgia](#). M. A. Thesis. Auburn: Auburn University December 16, 2005, p. 63; Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026.

¹³⁷⁵ Rogers, William Warren, Jr. "The Founding of Alabama's Land-Grant College at Auburn.," *Alabama Review*, Vol. 69 No 1 (January 2016), p. 60

The decisive turn came in February. The selection committee, expected to recommend Florence, was delayed by other business and by tactics favorable to rival cities. When the issue finally reached the House on February 13, the majority report for Florence was not presented. Instead, William Murrah and four other committee members submitted a minority report favoring Auburn. Their argument was revealing. They did not simply contend that Auburn was a better town. They argued that Auburn offered a larger and more valuable building than Florence, and that the Methodists at Auburn had “properly relinquished all proprietary claims” to the college. The legislature then entered several days of reconsideration, substitution, and parliamentary maneuver. On February 24, 1872, the bill locating the land-grant college at Auburn finally passed. Governor Lindsay signed the bill on February 26, 1872.¹³⁷⁶

The Florence defeat should therefore not be read as the inevitable triumph of Auburn’s educational superiority. It was the triumph of a more successful legislative package. Auburn’s supporters solved the immediate statutory and political problem posed by the Morrill Act: the state needed an existing plant; it needed an institution that could be converted without construction; it needed local land; it needed denominational consent; and it needed to act before the federal timetable slipped beyond reach. Florence had many of these advantages, but Auburn’s friends persuaded the legislature that their title was clearer, their physical plant better, and their local coalition more serviceable.

In this period of Congressional Reconstruction, race supplied the suppressed counter-history of the whole proceeding. [Peyton Finley](#) of Montgomery County, the only Black member of the State Board of Education, proposed that part of the federal funds be set aside for an agricultural college for Black Alabamians. The board approved the proposal, but the legislature ignored it. Cox and Steward conclude that the Board of Education had thereby gone on record for one Black and one white land-grant college, even though the legislature created only the white institution.¹³⁷⁷ Rogers shows that the race question did not disappear. During the legislative struggle, Representative [Holland Thompson](#) sought to

¹³⁷⁶ Rogers, William Warren, Jr. “The Founding of Alabama’s Land-Grant College at Auburn,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 69 No 1 (January 2016), pp. 73-74.

¹³⁷⁷ Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. “[The Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction](#).” *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026

require equal facilities “for all students,” and other proposals attempted either to prohibit racial exclusion or to create separate provisions for Black students.¹³⁷⁸ These efforts failed. The state’s chosen Morrill institution would be for whites only, and the Black educational claim would be deferred, narrowed, and eventually redirected into the separate and unequal world of Black normal and industrial education.¹³⁷⁹

The Normal School Solution.

William Warren Rogers concluded, in his analysis of the placement of the land-grant program at Auburn, that the decision in December 1872 to site the state normal school at Florence reflected the legislature’s effort to appease the embittered advocates of North Alabama still fuming about the South Alabama triumph.¹³⁸⁰ But certainly it was more complex than that. The advocacy from the Shoals was powerful. [Mayor Neander Rice](#) of Florence was an influential Unionist with contacts in Montgomery. He aligned, at least for a time, with the Unionist-Republican order that emerged after the war. He served as mayor of Florence during the crucial years



105 Mayor Neander Rice

¹³⁷⁸Rogers, William Warren, Jr. “The Founding of Alabama’s Land-Grant College at Auburn.,” *Alabama Review*, Vol. 69 No 1 (January 2016), p. 65; “Land-Grant Colleges in Alabama.” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed July 2, 2026; Mayberry, B. D. [A Century of Agriculture in the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University, 1890-1990](#). New York: Vantage Press, 1991; Marcus, Alan, ed. [Science as Service: Establishing and Reformulating American Land-Grant Universities, 1865-1930](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015.

¹³⁷⁹ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889, p. 278; “[Alabama A&M University](#),” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed June 11, 2026; Morrison, Richard D. [History of Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University](#). Huntsville: Liberal Arts Press, 1994. Under the [second Morrill Act of 1890](#), states practicing racial segregation at that time were required to either admit black students to the states’ existing land-grant college or establish a separate institution for them. In 1873, when the Normal school discussions were a matter of public priority, the Huntsville Normal School for blacks had been founded, opening in 1875. Following the 1890 legislation, it was transformed into Alabama’s black land-grant college, receiving federal support for instruction in agriculture and the mechanical arts

¹³⁸⁰ Rogers, William Warren, Jr. “The Founding of Alabama’s Land-Grant College at Auburn.,” *Alabama Review*, Ebsco. ProQuest. UT Libraries. Vol. 69, no. 1 (January 2016) , p. 75.

1869–1870 and 1871–1873 when the efforts to preserve its leading educational asset were taking place. Well placed, he served as Alabama secretary of state in 1873–1874.¹³⁸¹ Equally importantly, [David Peter Lewis](#) (1820-1884), a Unionist and a Republican, assumed the Governor’s Office in November 1872. Lewis, who likely attended La Grange College prior to 1849, would be the last Republican governor for over 100 years. As a probable graduate of La Grange and a Tennessee Valley citizen, he would have been a well-placed sympathetic supporter of the Florence Wesleyan initiative.¹³⁸² Susan Vaughn, in her reports, also attributed a major role to the indefatigable William Basil Wood along with Dr. Albert H. Jones.¹³⁸³

The rise of the normal school in Alabama was not a single occurrence but the consequence of a faltering Reconstruction sequence. As early as 1868 the State Board of Education attempted to create normal classes for the training of teachers, experimenting with projected normal schools in Perry County and elsewhere. The state even contemplated and briefly opened a scattered system of white and colored normal programs, but many of these provisions were poorly funded, short-lived, or never fully put into operation. Florence therefore became “first” in a more precise institutional sense: it was the first enduring state-supported normal school in Alabama’s white public normal-school lineage, housed in the former

¹³⁸¹ Freeman, Lee. [A House Divided: Lauderdale Countians and the Civil War](#). Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area. Online. Accessed July 3, 2026

¹³⁸² McGregor, A. A. [History of LaGrange College 1904](#). 102 pp. Kindle Book download copies of photocopies of the title. The best digital edition can be found at the link above: *Roar: Repository for Open Access, Archives and Research*. University of North Alabama. Accessed July 3, 2026, p. 27; [“David P. Lewis.” Wikipedia](#). Online. Accessed May 31, 2026. Contemporary chronicler James Edmonds Saunders identifies David P. Lewis as a student of La Grange College, a conclusion independently repeated by A. A. McGregor, himself a former student and professor at La Grange whose account likely reflects institutional memory rather than dependence upon Saunders. Walter B. Posey later repeats the identification as do others. Modern biographical treatments of Lewis, including those published by the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Encyclopedia of Alabama, do not discuss his collegiate education, and no surviving matriculation records have been located to confirm or refute the claim. Accordingly, Lewis’s attendance at La Grange is regarded here as probable, though not conclusively documented.

¹³⁸³ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 12. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [“The South’s Oldest State Teacher’s College.”](#) *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), p. 283; Burleson, D. S. [“History of the Florence Normal College,”](#) *Florence Normal College Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May 1910), p. 12. Source: [ROAR”. Repository for Open Access, Archives, and Research](#).

Florence Wesleyan University and preserved after Reconstruction in the Code and subsequent legislation. At the same time, Black normal education developed along a separate track at Marion and Huntsville, revealing that Alabama's commitment to teacher training emerged inseparably from the rigid racial separation that would define Southern public education for generations.¹³⁸⁴

That transition was especially poignant in the Tennessee Valley. The region had once supported prestigious preparatory schools and colleges, signs of refinement and local aspiration. After the war, North Alabama needed teachers, public schools, practical instruction, and institutions that could resurrect a devastated society. The Normal School as it evolved did not erase the contradictions of race, gender, and class. The school in Florence, like others in the state and the South, entered a segregated order and would remain implicated in the continuing inequities of public education. But it also represented the survival of learning under new terms: from classical college to public instrument, from preparation of the

¹³⁸⁴ Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama 1702-1889](#). Bureau of Education, Circular of Information No. 3, 1889. Washington, GPO, 1889.; Weeks, Stephen Beauregard. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913; Alabama, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama, 1869-70*, no. 76, "An Act to provide school buildings for the State Normal School located in Perry county," approved February 7, 1870; Alabama, *Acts of the Session of 1870-71*, no. 189, "An Act to repeal an act entitled 'An act to provide school buildings for the State Normal Schools located in Perry county,'" approved March 8, 1871; Alabama Board of Education / General Assembly, "An Act to amend ... an act entitled an act to establish a normal school at Florence, Alabama for the education of white male teachers," approved December 5, 1873; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. "[The South's Oldest State Teacher's College](#)." *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), pp. 282-288; Burleson, D. S. "[History of the Florence Normal College](#)," *Florence Normal College Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May, 1910), pp. 5-25. Source: [ROAR". Repository for Open Access, Archives, and Research](#). Online. Accessed June 11, 2026.; Sherer, Robert G. *Subordination or Liberation? The Development and Conflicting Theories of Black Education in Nineteenth Century Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977). Later issued as [Black Education in Alabama, 1865-1901](#); Anderson, James D. [The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935](#) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Franklin, John Hope. [Reconstruction After the Civil War](#). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 3rd ed.; Coulter, E. Merton. [The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877](#). Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1947.

elite to teacher training, and from antebellum aspiration to Reconstruction necessity.¹³⁸⁵

The transformation of Florence Wesleyan University into the State Normal School at Florence belonged to a revolution in national and regional post-war educational philosophy. As shown, the older southern college had been built for a limited world. Its curriculum was classical, denominational, and socially selective; its purpose was to train ministers, lawyers, legislators, physicians, and local gentlemen whose authority rested as much upon family, property, and public reputation as upon specialized professional competence. La Grange College and Florence Wesleyan University stood within that antebellum tradition. They offered moral discipline, classical studies, mathematics, rhetoric, and a measure of natural philosophy to a narrow class of young men who were expected to lead rather than to labor. That pattern did not disappear after the Civil War, but it could no longer answer the scale of the postwar crisis confronting the state.

By 1865 Alabama faced not merely the collapse of an older educational order, but the exposure of how perilously narrow that order had always been. The plantation South had produced schools, academies, colleges, and tutors for those who could pay for them, but it had not produced a broadly literate people. Enslaved Alabamians had been denied schooling by law, custom, and design. Many poor white families had lived beyond the reach of accessible instruction, especially in rural districts where the school term was brief, teachers were unevenly prepared, and local taxation for schools was politically fragile. The result was not simply an educational deficiency but a civic incapacity. A state that had long imagined education as a private or denominational undertaking now confronted the problem of public reconstruction: how to create citizens, teachers, clerks, farmers, mechanics, and public officials for a society no

¹³⁸⁵ Geiger, Roger L., ed. [*The American College in the Nineteenth Century*](#). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000; Cremin, Lawrence A. [*American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*](#). New York: Harper & Row, 1980; Geiger, Roger L. [*The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II*](#). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015; Weeks, Stephen B.. [*History of Public School Education in Alabama*](#). United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, No. 12. Whole Number 637. Washington DC: GPO, 1913;

longer organized around slavery but still crippled by the habits, poverty, and inequalities slavery had left behind.¹³⁸⁶

The census figures make the problem visible. In 1870, Alabama still contained hundreds of thousands of persons over the age of ten who could not read or write. The burden fell most heavily upon the formerly enslaved, but illiteracy was not confined to Black Alabamians. Tens of thousands of white Alabamians were also illiterate. According to the *1870 Ninth Federal Census: Statistics of the Population* (p. 396), the illiteracy rate in the state in 1870 among adults over age [ten was greater than](#) 50%. As many as one quarter of its white population remained illiterate, while the proportion of Black Alabamians exceeded 85%. Literacy, like land, capital, and political influence, had been distributed unequally. If the state was to build a system of common schools, it first had to confront the shortage of people capable of teaching in them. The normal school arose from that need. It was not simply another college. It was a public instrument designed to multiply teachers.¹³⁸⁷

The word “normal” carried a meaning now easily lost. A normal school was meant to establish norms—methods, standards, habits of discipline, and patterns of instruction—by which teachers could be trained and public classrooms made orderly. Its work was practical in a way the older classical college had not been. It sought to teach teachers how to teach: how to organize a classroom, drill pupils in reading and arithmetic, manage younger children, prepare lessons, keep records, and apply uniform methods across scattered local schools. This pedagogical purpose was central to the common-school movement across the United States.

¹³⁸⁶ For the broader transformation from classical, denominational, and elite education toward public schooling and practical instruction, see Cremin, Lawrence A. [American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876](#) (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); and Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Flynt, J. Wayne. [Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites](#). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989.

¹³⁸⁷ United States Census Bureau. *1870 Census: Statistics of the Population*. Online. Accessed July 3, 2026. Fitzgerald, Michael W. [Reconstruction in Alabama: from Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South](#). Baton Rouge: University Press, 2017, p. 317. More than 349,000 were unable to read; 383,000 were unable to write; Fleming, Walter Lynwood. [Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama](#). New York: Macmillan, 1905, Chapter XIX; [120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait](#) (Edited by Tom Snyder, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993; Horton, Rouchen. [“A brief study of illiteracy in the United States.”](#) *Peabody Journal of Education*, 1:2, (1923), pp. 108-114.

Advocates of public schooling had learned that schools could not be created merely by statute. Buildings, funds, and administrative offices were necessary, but none of them could educate children without teachers. The normal school was therefore the institutional hinge between public-school aspiration and public-school reality.¹³⁸⁸

In Alabama that hinge was weak at first. The rise of the normal school was not a single founding but a faltering Reconstruction sequence. As early as 1868 the State Board of Education attempted to create normal classes for the training of teachers. Before the Florence school took permanent form Alabama had experimented with projected normal schools in Perry County and elsewhere. The state even contemplated a scattered system of white and colored normal schools, but many of these provisions were poorly funded, short-lived, or never fully put into operation. Florence therefore became “first” only in a more precise institutional sense: it was the first enduring state-supported normal school in Alabama’s white public normal-school lineage, housed in the former Florence Wesleyan University and preserved after Reconstruction in the Code and subsequent legislation. At the same time, Black normal education developed along a separate track at Marion and Huntsville, revealing that Alabama’s commitment to teacher training emerged inseparably from the racial separation that would define southern public education for generations.¹³⁸⁹

Indeed, the first Reconstruction experiment was not Florence State Normal, but the creation of normal classes in other places. In August 1868 the State Board of Education authorized advanced classes in selected towns and cities for pupils who wished to prepare for teaching. These classes were to be attached to existing schools rather than established as separate institutions. The plan was direct and utilitarian. Pupils could receive instruction in approved methods of teaching and practice by instructing younger children. In return, they were required to promise in writing that, once qualified, they would teach in Alabama’s public schools for at least

¹³⁸⁸ On normal schools as institutions for teacher preparation and pedagogical standardization, see Ogren, Christine A. [The American State Normal School: “An Instrument of Great Good.”](#) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

¹³⁸⁹ Weeks, Stephen B. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#), U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, no. 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 154–56; Clark, Willis G. [History of Education in Alabama, 1702–1889](#), Circular of Information No. 3, Contributions to American Educational History, no. 8 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 239–58, 269–78.

two years. By 1869 the superintendent reported nine such normal classes, enrolling approximately three hundred prospective teachers. It was a sensible expedient for a devastated state: use existing facilities, train promising pupils quickly, and bind them to future service in the public schools.¹³⁹⁰

Yet the experiment also revealed the limits of Reconstruction educational policy in Alabama. The state's finances were unstable, its school fund uncertain, and its politics bitter. School warrants depreciated; teachers often went unpaid; opponents charged extravagance or mismanagement; and the public-school system itself became a site of partisan struggle. Normal classes were easily criticized because they produced obligations before they produced visible results. To Conservatives and many taxpayers, they looked like another expensive Reconstruction device. To the school authorities, they were an unavoidable investment in the personnel of public education. The contest was therefore not merely over pedagogy but over the meaning of the state itself. Would Alabama assume responsibility for educating its children, or would education remain local, private, denominational, and irregular?¹³⁹¹

The ambition of the State Board briefly outran its resources. In 1871 Alabama considered a wide network of normal schools, divided by race and, in some cases, by sex. Four normal schools were proposed for Black teachers at Montgomery, Huntsville, Marion, and Sparta. Four were proposed for white teachers at Talladega, Tuscumbia, Scottsboro, and Midway. A separate normal school for white women teachers was also contemplated, and a central normal school for white teachers was linked to the University of Alabama. The plan suggests both breadth and fragility. Alabama's Reconstruction authorities understood the teacher shortage as statewide, not local. They also understood that Black schools would require Black teachers and that women would become increasingly important to the teaching profession. But the same plan exposed the political compromise at the heart of southern public education. The system was public, but it was to be separate. The state would train teachers, but it

¹³⁹⁰ Weeks, Stephen B. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#), U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, no. 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 154–56; “Public Education during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era.” *Alabama Encyclopedia*. Online. Accessed June 29, 2026

¹³⁹¹ Weeks, Stephen B. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#), U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, no. 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 154–56

would train them within racial boundaries that emancipation had challenged and white Alabama soon reasserted.¹³⁹²

Florence Normal emerged from this unsettled sequence. The old Florence Wesleyan University, already weakened by war, denominational withdrawal, financial exhaustion, and declining enrollment, possessed what the state lacked: buildings, a recognizable institutional name, and a setting in which an educational experiment might be made to appear continuous rather than revolutionary. And the legislature was familiar with those assets given the recent land grant gambit.

The first state statutory purpose was narrow: a normal school for the education of white male teachers. In 1873 the act was amended to admit both men and women, and by 1877 the Florence school had been preserved in the post-Reconstruction legal order as a permanent state institution for the education of white male and female teachers.¹³⁹³

The significance of Florence lies partly in that survival. Other normal-school measures had flickered and failed; Florence endured. It became the first lasting state-supported normal school in Alabama's white public system and later the institutional ancestor of the University of North Alabama. Yet its survival should not obscure the more complicated chronology. The Florence school did not spring fully formed from a settled state policy. It was one piece of a larger improvisation, the most durable remnant of several Reconstruction attempts to solve the teacher problem. Its later reputation as the first normal school in the South is therefore true only when stated with care. Florence was the first enduring state-

¹³⁹² Weeks, Stephen B. [History of Public School Education in Alabama](#), U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1915, no. 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 154–56; “Public Education during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era.” *Alabama Encyclopedia*. Online. Accessed June 29, 2026. “[Frederick’s Education in Virginia, 1861-1870.](#)” *Encyclopedia of Virginia*. Online. Accessed June 29, 2026

¹³⁹³ See also Alabama, *Acts Passed by the Board of Education of the State of Alabama at the Session of 1872, and Approved by the Governor* (Montgomery: Arthur Bingham, 1873), especially the legislation establishing the Florence normal school; and Alabama, *Acts of the Board of Education Presented to the Legislature, 1873* (Montgomery: Arthur Bingham, 1874), for the amendment admitting both men and women; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. “[The South’s Oldest State Teacher’s College.](#)” *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), pp. 282-288; Burleson, D. S. “[History of the Florence Normal College,](#)” *Florence Normal College Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May, 1910), pp. 5-25. Source: [ROAR”. Repository for Open Access, Archives, and Research](#)

supported teachers' college south of the Ohio River in the white normal-school lineage; it was not the first attempt in Alabama to train teachers, nor did it stand outside the simultaneous creation of separate Black normal institutions.¹³⁹⁴

Those Black institutions were not incidental. They represented the most urgent educational demand of emancipation. Freedpeople sought schools with extraordinary energy, often before the state was prepared to provide them. Churches, the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, northern teachers, Black communities, and Reconstruction officials all contributed to the rapid growth of Black education. But the supply of trained Black teachers was small, and white teachers who entered Black classrooms often faced hostility, violence, or political suspicion. The training of Black teachers was therefore a central requirement of Black education itself. The [Lincoln School at Marion](#), founded by formerly enslaved men and later connected to state normal instruction, became one important center. Huntsville, under the leadership of [William Hooper Council](#), became another. The state's appropriations to Black normal education were modest, but their existence marked a real Reconstruction achievement: the state had been forced to acknowledge, however grudgingly and unequally, that the education of Black Alabamians required public support and trained teachers.¹³⁹⁵

That achievement was compromised from the beginning. Alabama did not build a unified system of public education. It built a segregated one. Separate normal schools for white and black teachers meant separate schools for white and black children. Separate appropriations meant *unequal* appropriations. Separate governance allowed white officials to limit the scope, quality, and ambition of Black education. Thus, the normal-school movement carried two meanings at once. It was an instrument of public enlightenment, teacher preparation, and civic reconstruction; it was also an instrument through which the state organized education within the

¹³⁹⁴ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. "[The South's Oldest State Teacher's College.](#)" *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1936), pp. 282-288

¹³⁹⁵ "[Freedmen's Education in Virginia, 1861-1870.](#)" *Encyclopedia of Virginia*. Online. Accessed June 29, 2026; "[William Hooper Council](#)." *Wikipedia*. Online. Accessed June 29, 2026; Council, W. H. [Race History Illuminated. A Compendium of Race History Comprising facts Gleaned from Every Field for Millions of Readers.](#) Nashville: J. T. Haley & Co., 1898, pp. 36-45.

racial order that would harden into Jim Crow. The normal school did not escape the contradictions of Reconstruction. It embodied them.

Even so, the rise of the normal school marked a profound shift in Alabama's educational imagination. The antebellum college had assumed that the community required a small number of educated leaders. The normal school assumed that the community required many teachers. The old college conferred distinction; the normal school multiplied instruction. The old college took students out of the common life and trained them for leadership; the normal school sent its graduates back into the common life to teach children who might never see a college. This was a democratic turn in purpose, though not yet a democratic fulfillment in practice. The state's first duty was no longer merely to cultivate gentlemen but to create the conditions under which ordinary children might learn to read, write, calculate, and participate in public life.

For the Tennessee Valley, the symbolism was especially sharp. Wesleyan Hall had been built as a monument to denominational ambition and classical aspiration. After the war it became a workshop for public necessity. Its classrooms, once linked to the older world of Methodist collegiate culture, now served the humbler and more urgent task of preparing teachers for Alabama schools. This did not mean that classical learning vanished, nor that the new institution immediately achieved broad social equality. Rather, the same physical structure came to house a different educational premise. Learning was no longer justified only by its power to refine leaders. It was justified by its usefulness to a people in need of schools.

This change paralleled other postwar developments. The Morrill land-grant movement likewise reflected a national conviction that public higher education should serve agriculture, mechanic arts, science, and the practical professions. In Alabama, the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Auburn and the State Normal School at Florence represented different but related responses to the same crisis. One addressed agricultural and technical instruction; the other addressed the teacher supply. Both signaled the decline of an older educational monopoly. The classical college did not disappear, but it was joined—and in some settings displaced—by institutions designed to serve a broader public economy.¹³⁹⁶

¹³⁹⁶ Ross, Earle D. [*Democracy's College: The Land-Grant Movement in the Formative Stage*](#). Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1942; Cox, Cudan and Rodney J. Steward. "[The Old South, Civil](#)

Importantly, Florence Normal marks the beginning of the next chapter, not the conclusion of an older one. La Grange and Florence



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Wesleyan had belonged to the age of denominational colleges, local academies, and elite classical formation. The State Normal School belonged to the age of public systems, teacher certification, common schools, and practical reconstruction. It arose haltingly, amid poverty, racial separation, and political conflict. But it also arose from a hard postwar recognition: Alabama could not rebuild merely by educating a few sons of the old order. It needed teachers in numbers. It needed schools in every county. It needed literacy among people whom the old order had neglected or deliberately suppressed. In that sense, the normal school was not simply the successor to Florence Wesleyan. It was the institutional sign that a different educational future had become unavoidable.

[War, and Reconstruction.](#)" *The Auburn Digital Library*. Auburn University. Online. Accessed June 23, 2026. Importantly discusses the competition for Morrill Land-Grant funds between Auburn, Tuscaloosa and Florence.

Florence State Normal: The First Years.

Florence State Normal received its charter, December 15, 1872, from the Reconstruction-era State Board of Education when the Methodist Church again offered the property to the state. The legislature itself appears to have played no part in the establishment of the school.¹³⁹⁷ The first Board of Directors was chaired by local industrialist and physician Dr. Albert H. Jones, and included among its ranks, the other brokers—Neander H. Rice, William Basil Wood, ex-Governor, Robert Miller Patton, and Superintendent of Education Joseph H. Speed.¹³⁹⁸ Florence State Normal would open its doors in 1873, with David Peter Lewis as Governor, and Neander Rice as Alabama's Secretary of State.¹³⁹⁹ The first President of the Normal School was none other than the loyal and long-serving Septimus Primus Rice, whose tenure with various instantiations of the college traced uninterruptedly to the final years of La Grange and included the carriage ride to Florence with the 1855 initiative.¹⁴⁰⁰ The faculty included the Rev. Hardie Brown, a Methodist minister of renown and himself a future president of the Normal School; W. D. Wills, a local instructor, who taught some classes at Wesleyan Hall in the quiescent year of 1871, and [James K. Powers](#), who would also serve as President at a later date.¹⁴⁰¹

Like the land-grant college at Auburn, Florence Normal and other similar schools chartered later focused their attention on the immediate

¹³⁹⁷ Burleson, D. S. "[History of the Florence Normal College](#)," *Florence Normal College Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May, 1910), p. 13. Source: [ROAR". Repository for Open Access, Archives, and Research](#); Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 12. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access,

¹³⁹⁸ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research. Other members of the Board were B. P. Joiner, secretary; Hon. T. T. Allington, Hon. R. O. Pickett, James B. Irvine, and the Hon. Joseph H. Speed.

¹³⁹⁹ Burleson, D. S. "[History of the Florence Normal College](#)," *Florence Normal College Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May, 1910), p. 13. Source: [ROAR". Repository for Open Access, Archives, and Research](#).

¹⁴⁰⁰ West, Anson. [A History of Methodism in Alabama](#). Printed for the Author. Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Barbee and Smith, Agents, Nashville, TN 1893, p. 626.

¹⁴⁰¹ McDonald, William Lindsey. [Beginnings ... of the University of North Alabama: The Story of Florence Wesleyan University](#). Birmingham: Birmingham Print and Publishing Company, 1991, p. 48- 49; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 15. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

needs of a devastated state. The objective of Florence Normal was to educate and train teachers “for the elementary rural and small-town schools of Alabama.”¹⁴⁰² The entry requirements for acceptance into the Normal program reflected the educational unpreparedness of the population. Instead of the rigor of the antebellum classical college, those admitted were only expected to show “a respectable knowledge of English Grammar, Geography, and Arithmetic.” For those unable to rise to that expectation, Florence Normal from the beginning provided a preparatory department where aspirants could develop necessary skills for admission. Into the school were admitted two categories of students: academic students who paid tuition and upon graduation went about their chosen pursuits, and the “normal” student who was admitted tuition-free with the requirement that a two-year obligation to teach in the public schools would be met.¹⁴⁰³

Florence State Normal School opened its first session in September 1873. Although the initial class consisted entirely of young men, the Board of Education immediately resolved to admit women over the age of fifteen, and instructed the trustees to take the necessary steps to secure their admission.¹⁴⁰⁴ Thirty-one women enrolled in September 1874, making Florence one of the earliest coeducational institutions in the South and among the first state-supported teacher-training institutions in the nation to provide classroom instruction to men and women together. The initiative seems to have been successful from the beginning, as the 1874–1875 State Normal catalog proclaimed:

Young Ladies and Young Gentlemen have been members of the same classes and have received the same instruction; and it is the pleasure of the faculty to announce that in their opinion

¹⁴⁰² The charge to the Normal School cited in Owen, Thomas McAdory and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 596.

¹⁴⁰³ Owen, Thomas McAdory and Marie Bankhead Owen. [History of Alabama and dictionary of Alabama Biography](#). Vol. 1, 1921, p. 597; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 15. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

¹⁴⁰⁴ *Florence Times-Journal*. Vol. III, No. 89 (December 8, 1873), p. 3.

*the experiment has been eminently successful. The attrition consequent upon an intimate association between the Parties has exerted a beneficial influence upon the deportment of all.*¹⁴⁰⁵

The catalog was also affirmative of the solemn teaching mission of the new school:

*The President will deliver a regular course of lectures on the Art and Science of Teaching, with special reference to the Organization and Discipline of Schools. The teachers in each class are to give instruction as to the best methods of imparting information to their pupils.*¹⁴⁰⁶

With few students in the first years, the upper floors of Wesleyan Hall were converted once again into male dormitory rooms. Otherwise, men and women could obtain room and board in private homes for \$10-\$15 monthly.¹⁴⁰⁷

Importantly, the faculty and trustees took the additional step of establishing a model school, where schoolchildren from the community would receive instruction from Normal students under the supervision of master teachers—a de facto student-teacher ratio that enhanced primary school learning and student-teacher competency. Earning a stellar reputation through the decades, the model school survives to the present day as the popular and in-demand Kilby Laboratory School.¹⁴⁰⁸ Students passing the first year of the Normal curriculum were permitted to teach at the second-grade level, with passing students in their second and third year entitled to teach at progressively higher levels. By the end of the second

¹⁴⁰⁵ Catalog cited in Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 13. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Catalog cited in Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 16. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

¹⁴⁰⁷ *Florence Times-Journal*. Vol. III, No. 89 (December 8, 1878), p. 3. Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 15. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Kilby Laboratory School. University of North Alabama. Online. Accessed July 8, 2026; Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 16. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research.

year, the enrollment of 126 students included 50 Normal students, 29 of whom were women. At the first commencement in June 1877, there were four graduates – three women and one male.¹⁴⁰⁹

The transfer of the Methodist property to Alabama in 1872 therefore accomplished two things at once. It salvaged a campus that might otherwise have been lost, and it gave the state a ready-made home for teacher training. Richard Henderson Rivers chronicles the arc of learning in the Tennessee Valley:

*The college at Florence was actually given to the State of Alabama by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. So, the work of Bishop Paine and his associates and successors still live in an institution which promises great and increasing usefulness to the State which received it as a gift from the Church. ... Suffice it to say that to the last of his life Bishop Paine always regarded the school at Florence as the continuation of the one organized by himself in 1830.*¹⁴¹⁰

The lamp of learning continued to flicker in the Cumberland.

Postscript

The transformation of Florence Wesleyan University into the State Normal School¹⁴¹¹ in 1872 marked the beginning of Alabama's permanent commitment to public education. The State Normal School also appeared when the state began its retreat from Reconstruction's broader aspirations. Although the Constitution of 1868 had established a statewide public school system without constitutionally mandating racial separation, the

¹⁴⁰⁹ Vaughn, Susan Kirkman. [History of State Teachers College, Florence, Alabama](#). Florence: Alabama State Teachers College, c. 1913-39, p. 17. Found in ROAR: Repository for Open Access, Archive and Research

¹⁴¹⁰ Rivers, Richard Henderson. [The Life of Robert Paine, D.D.: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South](#). Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1916, p. 71.

¹⁴¹¹ The public institution that succeeded Florence Wesleyan University would be known variously as Florence Normal School (1872-1887), Florence State Normal College (1887-1913), Florence State Normal School (1913-1929), Florence State Teachers College (1929-1957), Florence State College (1957-1968), Florence State University (1968-1974), and University of North Alabama (1974-), per Steen, Robert S. [The History of LaGrange College](#). Privately published. Circa 2015, p.168.

political collapse of Reconstruction soon redirected that experiment. The [Constitution of 1875](#) dismantled much of the centralized educational structure created during Reconstruction and made separate public schools the constitutional policy of the State of Alabama. Higher education followed the same course. The Morrill land-grant settlement and the emerging system of state normal schools established parallel institutions for white and Black students, unequal in resources and opportunity even as both were acknowledged to be public responsibilities. The promise of universal education endured; the promise of common¹⁴¹² education did not.

History, however, rarely ends where institutions suppose it does. Ninety-one years after the State of Alabama assumed stewardship of Florence Wesleyan's campus, the educational settlement fashioned during Reconstruction reached an unexpected point of resolution. In the summer of 1963, after being denied admission solely because of his race, Tuscumbia native [Wendell Wilkie Gunn](#) sought the assistance of civil rights attorney [Fred Gray](#). Gray obtained a federal court order requiring the admission of Gunn to Florence State College, the direct institutional successor of the 1872 State Normal School. On September 11, 1963, Gunn quietly enrolled, permanently integrating the oldest publicly supported institution of higher learning in Alabama. The event passed without the violence that accompanied integration elsewhere in the South, but its historical significance was profound: the institution that had entered public service during Reconstruction as a normal school for white teachers had finally become, in practice as well as law, a public institution open to all Alabamians.¹⁴¹³

Between Wade Keyes and Fred Gray lay a century of constitutional argument. Wade Keyes represented an antebellum constitutional culture in which unequal citizenship was legally coherent. Fred Gray represented the constitutional culture that finally insisted the promises of the Reconstruction Amendments be honored in the institutions that Alabama itself had created. Each lawyer appealed to the Constitution, yet each understood citizenship in fundamentally different ways. The history of

¹⁴¹² "Land-Grant Colleges in Alabama." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed July 8, 2026.

¹⁴¹³ Quiros, Ansley. "[The Forgotten School Integration Story that Challenges What We Know.](#)" *Time*. November 1, 2023. Online. Accessed July 8, 2026; "Wendell Wilkie Gunn." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed July 8, 2026; "Fred Gray." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Online. Accessed July 8, 2026.

Florence—from Methodist college to state normal school to public university—unfolded within that larger constitutional transformation. The institution endured while the meaning of American citizenship itself was being rewritten.

Thus, the long history that began with a small Methodist college on Lawrence's Hill in 1830 found its fullest meaning not simply in survival, but in enlargement. Across more than a century, the institution evolved from a denominational academy serving a privileged minority into a public university dedicated to the education of an entire people. The path was neither straight nor just. It traversed Indian removal, slavery, civil war, emancipation, Reconstruction, constitutional segregation, and finally the quiet vindication of equal educational opportunity. The light that first came to the Cumberland did not shine uninterruptedly, but neither was it extinguished. Its brightest promise lay not in the institution's beginnings, but in its continuing enlargement of the circle of those permitted to learn.

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Central Thesis:

The article examines the jurisprudence of Alabama Supreme Court Justice Thomas M. Peters during Reconstruction, highlighting his exceptional efforts to protect the rights of African Americans through rigorous adherence to the rule of law and recognition of racial prejudice. Peters, a Unionist and staunch advocate for equal rights, stood out in a Southern judiciary largely hostile to African Americans, addressing systemic racism in cases involving criminal procedure and marriage rights.

Legal/Academic Issues Addressed:

- Racial discrimination and equal rights protections in the Reconstruction South.
- The role of state courts in enforcing or undermining African American rights during Reconstruction.
- The gap in scholarship on Southern state judges and their treatment of African American litigants.
- The tension between legal principles of equality and persistent racial prejudice.

Methodologies/Data Sources:

- Analysis of Justice Peters' court opinions and dissents.
- Examination of specific cases involving African American litigants, including criminal procedure and marriage rights.
- Historical context provided by Reconstruction-era legal treatises and scholarly works.
- Review of secondary sources on Reconstruction history and Southern judiciary.

Findings/Analysis:

- Peters consistently applied principles of equal rights and natural law to protect African American litigants.
- He dissented in cases like *McElvain v. Mudd*, arguing slavery was morally and legally unjust.
- Peters enforced procedural protections for African American defendants, ensuring their rights to testimony and jury instructions.
- He recognized the validity of marriages formed during slavery, citing natural rights and post-emancipation legal frameworks.
- While not always ruling in favor of African American litigants, Peters sought to limit judicial discretion and mitigate racial bias.

Recommendations/Implications:

- Peters' jurisprudence offers a model for addressing systemic prejudice in the judiciary.
- His commitment to equal rights and strict legal adherence provides lessons for modern efforts to combat discrimination.
- The article underscores the importance of studying state-level judicial histories to fully understand Reconstruction's legal legacy.

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1. **The "John Bell" Endorsement:** Look for documents dated **September 1841**. These are the cover sheets for the final payout that Ross fought for.
2. **The "Abstract of Expenditures":** This specific document within Roll 85 will be a large, multi-page ledger. It is usually easier to read than the letters because it is written in a very clear, professional clerk's hand.
3. **Voucher 22:** As you scan the columns on the left-hand side of these ledger pages, look for the number **22**. That is the specific line item for the Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad.)

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William G. Clark was an Alabama educator and state school official who produced historical surveys of Alabama education in connection with state educational reform efforts around the turn of the twentieth century. His work emerged during the era when Alabama's educational leadership was attempting to legitimize and expand the public-school system while simultaneously defending the racial and political order established after Redemption.

Clark tended to write from what might be called a **state-building perspective**. He celebrated educational progress, praised educational leaders, and generally accepted the political assumptions of post-Reconstruction white Alabama. In his treatment of Reconstruction, African American political participation, and federal intervention, he largely reflected prevailing white southern opinion.

He was not a systematic theorist of race in the manner of Walter Fleming, but he accepted the assumptions of white supremacy that permeated southern educational writing of his generation. Black education appears in his work largely as a problem of administration and social order rather than as a story of Black aspiration, institution-building, or citizenship.

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and travel of a Confederate ex-patriate family in Rio de Janeiro. Of note is the autobiography of Charles A. Hentz, who expanded on his diaries with more extensive description of inhabitants of and life in Louisville, Ky., Cincinnati, Ohio, New Orleans, La., Mobile and Tuskegee, Ala., and Jackson and Gadsden counties, Fla.; travels in the southern United States; the Mexican War; his medical education and practice; alcoholism, recreational drug use, and drug addicts in the community; the flora and fauna of the Panhandle region of Florida; treatment of the wounded at the battles of Marianna and Natural Bridge, Fla.; the execution of Confederate deserters; and his citrus and vegetable farms in City Point, Brevard County, Fla. Hentz wrote chiefly about white people's lived experiences, but he also identified and provided contextual information about many Black people with whom he interacted. He also described more broadly attitudes toward enslaved people and racial violence, including lynchings. His medical notebooks document his most interesting cases, as well as more routine obstetrical care, for both white and Black patients. Hentz recorded case descriptions, geographic locations, and names of patients, and in many cases their enslavers. Other items include military records of an officer in the French Imperial Army; notes and writings on yellow fever and grave-robbing for dissection purposes, descriptions of fish and plants, and drafts of plays and stories; drawings and pictures of human, botanical, and animal subjects; biographical and genealogical sketches; a phrenological character analysis; photographic portraits; and a Hentz Family Bible.

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The collection consists chiefly of letters written by William Peek and George Peek, with letters written by other family members and friends scattered throughout the papers. Early items include letters relating to both men as students at the University of Virginia. In September 1861, William wrote to George from Little Rock, Ark., where he seemed to be enjoying the attentions of the governor's daughter. In November, George wrote of his

teaching position at Wesleyan College in Florence, Ala., and his twin ambitions of falling in love and pursuing a career in teaching. In 1862, William wrote of serving as a surgeon without benefit of medical training in the 2nd Virginia Cavalry Regiment, mostly in the vicinity of Orange Court House and Martinsburg, Va. George's 1862 letters discuss fighting in and around Huntsville, Ala., and Florence, Ala. By April 1863, George had joined the 26th Alabama Infantry Regiment. On 11 June 1863, William wrote of frenzied activity near his camp in northern Virginia; his 8 July letter contains a brief description of the horrors of the Battle of Gettysburg in which he had just participated. A letter dated 19 July announced William's death. Letters after July 1863 relate chiefly to George. A few in 1866 concern William's parents' efforts to find William's grave. There also are letters from "Sis" and various other Peek family members, including brother Thomas Peek, about family news and activities. Post war letters from George indicate that he was a law student at the University of Virginia in 1866 and 1867. The few items after 1866 include an 1870 endorsement of George Peek's candidacy for a judgeship in Virginia. There is also an undated broadside, possibly from the 1850s, advertising a Virginia dry goods store run by a Peek family member. Kindle download of finding aid. Accessed 1/10/2025.

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Scott's and Shelley's Brigade. The 35th participated in the [Atlanta](#) Campaign, moved with Hood to Tennessee, and ended the war in North Carolina. It was organized with about 750 men, lost 4 killed, and 21 wounded at [Baton Rouge](#), and sustained heavy casualties at [Atlanta](#) and [Franklin](#). Only 55 officers and men surrendered in April, 1865. The field officers were Colonels Edward Goodwin, Samuel S. Ives, and James W. Robertson; Lieutenant Colonel William H. Hunt; and Major A.E. Ashford.

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Weeks (1865–1918), a North Carolinian trained as a professional historian, prepared *History of Public School Education in Alabama* for the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1915. The work became one of the standard references on Alabama educational history for decades.

Unlike Willis Clark, Weeks was writing within an emerging academic discipline. He gathered legislative records, reports, and administrative data with considerable diligence. Even today, Alabama historians still consult his work because he preserved information that is otherwise difficult to locate.

Yet Weeks was also a man of his era. His interpretation of Reconstruction education reflects assumptions that modern historians would recognize as closely aligned with the broader **Dunning School** consensus:

- Reconstruction governments are often portrayed as inefficient or politically misguided.
- White southern resistance receives more sympathetic treatment than Black political activism.
- African Americans appear more often as objects of policy than as historical actors.
- Educational advances among freedpeople are acknowledged, but usually through a paternalistic lens.
- The restoration of white Democratic rule is treated as a stabilizing development rather than a rollback of biracial democracy.

Weeks was not as overtly polemical as Walter L. Fleming, whose Reconstruction writings became classic expressions of Lost Cause and Dunning interpretations. In fact, Weeks often displays genuine admiration for educational progress among both races. But he rarely challenged the racial assumptions of Jim Crow society. His work therefore occupies a middle ground: professionally researched, often valuable, yet ideologically constrained

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Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1831 he was appointed the first president of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. While there, Woods helped to found the Alabama Female Athenaeum, whose purpose was to train women to become teachers. Woods and his family returned to Providence in 1837. He served as a Trustee of Brown University from 1843 to 1859 and as a member of the Board of Fellows from 1859 to 1887. The Alva Woods papers contain a variety of material, chiefly correspondence belonging to members of the Woods and Brown families; documents, publications, writings and photographs. The material is dated between 1657 and 2011. Most is dated between 1812 and 1918.

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